

### COASTAL GARDENER COLUMN

**Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.**

**Author's Notes:** As cooler days and nights signal a slowdown in turf grass growth, I would like to suggest that homeowners consider “grass cycling” as part of their lawn care regime beginning now and continuing into the indefinite future. Grass cycling is recycling grass clippings by leaving them on your lawn instead of catching them up in a bag and disposing of them in the green waste. Research has shown that grass cycling reduces the time required to mow the lawn, thus less work! It reduces waste because the grass clippings stay on the lawn. It reduces cost in labor and fuel. When grass clippings are recycled, the nutrients in the clippings stay on the lawn and decompose, thus less fertilizer is needed.

Any mower can be used to recycle grass clippings. Just remove the grass catcher. Many mowers now have a mulching attachment which can make a regular mower into a mulching mower. Finally, there are mowers with blade housings which are specifically for mulching. A mulching mower confines the grass clippings under the blade housing so that the clippings are more finely chopped before leaving the mower.

I have been grass cycling my lawn for this last summer and am pleased with the results. I have found that my mower tends to leave a little wind row of mulched clippings on the right side. These wind rows of grass created an aesthetic problem in the appearance of the lawn as they dried and turned tan in color. However, the problem was solved by mowing clockwise around the yard starting on the outside edge, working toward the center. Each pass would pick up the last wind row and mulch it more, eliminating the wind rows. Now with fall approaching, I am also mulching the falling leaves – so far it's working!

If you wish to consider grass cycling for your lawn, here are a few more things you should know. Try not to cut more than 1/3 of the grass blade in one mowing. If your mower is set for a 2-inch cut, the grass should not be allowed to grow more than an inch between mowing. Mow when the grass is dry. Wet grass tends to clump and ball under the blade housing and not spread evenly over the lawn. I always mow in the afternoon

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after the dew has evaporated. Keep your mower sharp. The cutting and mulching action of your mower will be more efficient. If the turf grass gets too high, raise the height of the mower and cut the grass, then lower the mower to the regular height and mow the grass again. It is best to allow a few days between the “high” cut and the “normal” cut. One final thought. The average healthy, 4000-square-foot lawn produces more than 1500 pounds of grass clippings each year. By leaving these clippings on the lawn, you will be adding a natural organic fertilizer to your lawn. Your lawn can remain healthy and vigorous because each time you mow, you will be returning valuable nutrients and moisture to the soil while you save time and fuel.

Also remember that most municipal parks and golf courses (fairways) practice grass cycling as a standard cultural procedure and it works. So give it a try.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**