



VILLAGE OF HALES CORNERS

5635 S. New Berlin Road
Hales Corners, WI 53130
(414) 529-6161

MULCHING

Any material that covers the soil surface around and under plants to protect and improve the area is considered a mulch. Mulches offer your garden and landscapes many benefits (See below). Yard wastes such as grass clippings, leaves, and chipped or shredded brush and branches can be used as organic mulches. Organic mulches are usually applied 3 inches deep over the soil and around plants to achieve the benefits of mulching.

Why Mulch?

- It covers the soil surface around plants and helps hold moisture in the soil.
- It moderates soil temperature.
- It reduces soil erosion and compaction.
- It keeps lawn mowers and weed whips away from tree trunks reducing damage that can lead to disease and insect invasion.
- It prevents mud and some disease organisms from splashing up onto leaves, flowers and fruits.

Getting started:

Mulching is as simple as taking the material that you have collected and placing it where you want the mulch. You can even just let leaves lie where they fall if you want an area mulched where the leaves naturally collect.

Apply grass clippings loosely to avoid packing and remember not to use grass clippings as mulch if your lawn has recently been treated with a herbicide or pesticide.

Use raked leaves as mulch beneath trees and shrubs as well as in planting beds. In addition to providing all of the benefits mulch covers provide in gardens, they can also help eliminate some of the hard-to-mow areas in your yard.

Chip or shred tree and shrub prunings to make an excellent mulch material for landscape plants. You can purchase garden-size chipper/shredders at hardware stores and from mail-order garden supply catalogs. They are also available for rent. Some commercial tree services will do custom chipping at the curbside.



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LEAVE THEM LIE - GRASSCYCLING

Grasscycling is leaving grass clippings on the lawn to decompose. Grass clippings are mostly water. When you mow regularly, clippings quickly decompose and release nutrients to fertilize the lawn.

Why Grasscycle?

- It reduces yard waste by 20% - 40% or more.
- It saves the time, trouble, and expense of bagging or putting clippings in cans.
- It saves gas and energy required to transport and process grass clippings.
- It reduces the need for fertilizer. Research shows that when you leave grass clippings on the lawn, you need as much as one third less fertilizer to achieve the same color and grass density found on lawns where the clippings are removed.
- It reduces the demand for water.
- It provides moisture and nutrients to the soil and cushioning layers to reduce wear.

Getting

Started

Just let your grass clipping from your mower or mulching mower lie where they fall. Remember, you only want to remove about 1/3 of the grass blade when you mow. With Kentucky bluegrass and fescue a final turf height of 2 inches is usually recommended. This means mowing off about 1 inch when the grass gets to be 3 inches in overall height. Thatch is not caused by letting grass clippings fall to the lawn, at least when the lawn is mowed on a regular basis. The young grass clippings are over 90% water, and they decompose rapidly (UW Extension InfoSource).

University of Minnesota (U of M) studies show the reduced need for nitrogen fertilization of turf when leaving grass clippings on the lawn. Table 13 shows nitrogen recommendations for established lawns and Table 14 recommends the best time to apply any fertilizer still needed. Both tables are from the Established Lawns and Turf section of the Soil Test Interpretations and Fertilizer Management for Lawns, Turf, Gardens, and Landscape Plants document on the U of M website. (<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/components/1731-22.html>)

Table 13. Annual nitrogen recommendations for an established lawn or turfgrass area

Maintenance Practices	Soil organic matter level ¹		
	Low	Medium to high	Organic soil
	Amount of nitrogen (N) to apply ^{2,3}		
	----- lb. N/1000 sq. ft. -----		
Regular irrigation			
Clippings removed	4.0	3.0□	2.00□
Clippings not removed	3.0	2.0□	1.00□
No irrigation		□	
Clippings removed	2.0	1.0□	0.50□
Clippings not removed	1.0	0.5	0.25

¹Low organic matter = less than 3.1%, medium to high = 3.1 to 19%, organic soil = greater than 19% organic matter.

²Multiply by 44 to convert the rates in lb./1000 sq. ft. to lb./acre.

³Apply no more than 1 lb. of quick-release N/1000 sq. ft. in a single application.