Friday’s Feature
By
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Mowing correctly makes a difference

Mowing is one of the most important aspects of maintaining a good quality lawn. Mowing correctly can increase the density of the lawn making it more resistant to those nagging weeds. Mowing incorrectly can cause problems.

One of the most important things you can do is to mow your lawn at the correct height. Visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH028 or call your local Extension Office to learn the correct height for your grass species.

It’s also important to follow good mowing practices such as:

- Pick up all stones, sticks, and other debris before mowing to avoid damaging the mower or injuring someone with flying objects.
- Mow only when the grass is dry.
- Sharpen the mower blade frequently.
- Adjust the cutting height properly by setting the mower on a driveway or sidewalk and use a ruler to measure the distance between the ground and the blade.
- Wash the mower after each use to reduce weed seed and disease movement.
- Mow in a different direction every time the lawn is cut.

Most lawns and sections of lawns are shaped such that one way of mowing is easiest and fastest – perhaps back and forth east/west, or around the periphery in a circular pattern. Because it is easier, we tend to mow that way every time. After a few mowing cycles, your repetitive tire tracks may start to show. If you do it long enough, or if you mow when the ground is wet, you may actually get ruts where you always run the mower.

The solution is to mow the way the pros do it – alternate or vary your mowing patterns. If you mowed east/west last week, mow north/south this week. Or, try mowing at an angle: southeast to northwest or southwest to northeast.

Alternating your mowing pattern will have two beneficial effects. First, you will minimize tire marks and ruts since you will run the tires in different places each time. Second, the alternate or varying patterns tend
be attractive since the previous pattern may still be visible after mowing so your lawn may take on a checkerboard appearance somewhat like the beautiful sports fields you see on TV. In most cases, it will take you somewhat longer to mow in the less efficient patterns, but the results can be well worth it.

Varying mowing patterns works very well and is easy to do in large, open turf areas. It can be much more difficult in small areas, particularly those that are long and narrow like some side-yards and the grassy areas between the sidewalk and street. Even though it is difficult, varying the pattern as much as possible on these odd areas is still beneficial.

Varying your mowing pattern can cause you to spend a little more time mowing, but the result will be a greatly improved appearance in your lawn. In larger turf areas, it is good to rotate among four patterns: east to west, north to south, diagonal southeast/northwest and diagonal southwest/northeast. In long, narrow, awkward areas, even alternating between two patterns will help reduce tire tracks and make your lawn look better. In other words, mow like the pros!

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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