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## Grass Clipping in Town or on Acreage

Composting is the most economical way to reduce grass clippings going into the landfill while preserving natural resources. Composting can be done without ever making a pile. Or you can make a pile and include cutting from perennial beds, groundcovers, garden refuse, leaves, and other annual plant residue.

Compost is nature's way of recycling by returning vital nutrients to the soil. Compost is the end product of decomposed organic material like grass clippings, leaves, wood and brush chips with soil. The key to a healthy compost pile is to keep it simple.

Grass clippings are best handled by composting in place using a "Don't Bag It" approach. Mow the grass using the one-third - two-thirds rule. The grass clippings can just drop back to the lawn or a mulching blade can be used to create finer clippings. Even handling leaves in this way will not create a problem for the lawn. Do grass clippings create thatch?

Research has shown that grass roots are the primary cause of thatch, not grass clippings. Thatch is composed primarily of roots, stems, rhizomes, and other plant materials. These plant materials contain large amounts of lignin (fibrous material) and decompose slowly. Grass clippings are approximately 80-85 percent water with only small amounts of lignin, and decompose rapidly.

Do grass clippings spread lawn diseases? Improper watering and fertilizing have a much greater impact on disease spread than grass clippings ever will. If a desirable environment for turf grass disease is present, infestation will occur whether clippings are collected or not!

Will grass clippings make my lawn look bad? If a lawn is properly mowed, watered, and fertilized, grass clippings will actually produce a healthier looking lawn. It is important to cut the lawn frequently to produce small clippings that will decompose quickly. If a lawn is not cut frequently and clippings are left on the lawn, it will produce a 'hay-like' look which can be unsightly. In these cases, which usually occur because of excessive rain, vacations, or heavy work schedules, collect the clippings for one mowing and put them in the compost pile in your yard or the city landfill compost pile.

Carbon is the energy element. Fresh grass clippings have lots of water, quite a bit of carbon, and some nitrogen (20 parts carbon to 1 part nitrogen). Good compost materials need a 30:1 C/N ratio. Which means we need more carbon material added to grass clippings. Wood chips, ground straw, leaves, dried garden refuse are all good candidates. Compost should be layered, clippings, dry refuse, a few shovelfuls of soil or older compost then more grass clippings. Moisture level should be 40-60% moisture but not wet. Dry materials mixed with wet grass clippings or letting the grass clippings dry a bit in thin layers before composting helps to adjust the moisture. If there is odor you are either too wet or have too much nitrogen. Of course the end result is compost with magic properties to make the garden and landscape sparkle.

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