

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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Scalping Your Lawn—Should You Do It?

There are usually pros and cons to every decision you make in life—even scalping your lawn. Scalping is defined as the removal of an excessive quantity of leaf tissue at any one mowing, resulting in a stubbly brown appearance due to exposed stems, stolons, crowns, dead leaves and even bare soil. While scalping is not normally recommended for the warm season turfgrasses during the active growing season or prior to winter dormancy, it can be a beneficial cultural practice in late winter to early spring. Benefits from early season scalping prior to green-up include: earlier spring green-up, control of some winter annual broadleaf weeds, and removal of some debris that could contribute to thatch accumulation. Scalping during the growing season will cause undue stress or potential injury to the turfgrass plants.

A more appropriate time to scalp warm season grass lawns is just prior to spring green-up. Drop your mower cutting height down to ½ - 1 inch and begin mowing. It is an excellent practice to remove old, dead plant material and to expose the soil to sunlight to warm the soil for quicker lawn green-up. Scalping too early may injure the turfgrass by exposing plant parts such as stolons and crowns to frost or extremely low temperatures. If delayed until the grass is actively growing, scalping will result in turf stress and shock the grass plant to the point that it slows growth until it can recover. Take caution to not overdo scalping on lawns with heavy thatch—especially on St. Augustine grass. If the active stolons (runners) are located in the upper portion of the thatch, scalping may cause a tremendous amount of damage to these vital plant parts and result in turf injury and even death.

Scalping creates a good bit of debris so it will be necessary to haul off all the old, dead plant material that is removed during the scalping process. However, do not bag this material and send it to the landfill. Landfills are not appropriate sites for disposing of yard waste. Instead, use the debris in your own compost pile or send it to a city or commercially owned compost site.

Scalping is a great cultural practice to help produce a strong, healthier stand of turfgrass when done correctly. However, use caution when scalping your lawn so as not to cause any injury or stress to the lawn.

It's Time to Sharpen Mower Blades!

Spring green-up will be here before you know it, so it's time to drag the old lawnmower out of the garage and get it ready for your lawn. One practice that is sometimes ignored but extremely important is sharpening your mower blades.

Dull blades will not only cause your lawn to look unattractive but can also place undue stress on your lawn. Leaf tips become splintered and ragged which leaves a straw colored appearance. These jagged-edged leaf tips are entry points for small insects and disease pathogens which can cause damage to your turf. So, pull the blades off the mower each month or so and give them a good sharpening. If they are in terrible shape, replace them—you'll be impressed with the results! If this is something that you do not feel comfortable doing yourself, then take your mower blades to a repair shop and have a professional do it for you. Your lawn will show its appreciation by an improved appearance. It will be healthier too!

Spring Landscape and Gardening Seminar

The Gregg County Master Gardeners are hosting their Spring Landscape and Gardening Seminar on Saturday, March 12, 2005 beginning at 8:00 a.m. in the Gregg County Extension Auditorium. Tickets are on sale for \$10 from any Gregg County Master Gardener or at the Gregg County Extension office. Speakers for the seminar include Mr. Gregg Grant and Mr. Aubrey King.

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