

# Getting the cut right

Cut quality is important when creating a healthier, greener lawn.

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**T**he importance of mowing, its frequency, timing, mowing height and direction – vertical and horizontal – is often underestimated. The old-fashioned push-along cylinder mower is rarely seen on domestic lawns today – at home, the majority of us use rotary mowers.

A cylinder mower has advantages; its cutting mechanism resembles a scissors and produces a clean wound of low surface area and the plant is able to repair relatively quickly.

A rotary mower, by contrast, delivers an impact cut. It rips and tears the leaf, inflicting a jagged wound with a large surface area, so recovery is slower. A sharp blade is much better than a blunt or dull blade in this scenario.

A dull green or yellowish brown green does not always mean the lawn is hungry. It may be struggling to recover after mowing. Your mower type and especially its blade or blades should be the first port of call when aiming for a greener, healthier lawn.

As for mowing frequency and height, this is often dictated by the weather. We can end up rutting or scalping, or both. We may over-compensate and mow lower, which exposes leaf sheaths and results in the grass canopy appearing bleached.

Turf that has been scalped is immediately under stress, as it no longer possesses the foliage needed for photosynthesis. Removing more than half of the leaf tissue at one time can stop root growth from six days to two weeks, depending on the amount of tissue removed.

With little foliage, the plants must draw down their stored carbohydrates to produce a new canopy. Closer-mown turf can be aesthetically pleasing, but it's less tolerant to environmental stress and is more disease prone.

There is a message here too for farmers mowing grass for silage – mowing excessively tight can leave the sward struggling to recover.

Normally, lawns are cut in a plane horizontal to the ground surface. As a result, the leaf cover of grass can result in the suppression of new



LEFT: Cutting in the vertical.



Using veticutting blades on a scarifier.



Accumulation of living grass leaves intermingled with decaying or partially decayed organic matter, brought to the surface for removal.

shoots (tillers), creeping stems and rhizomes.

In order to encourage the production of new shoots, professional gardeners occasionally use equipment that cuts at right angles to the soil surface.

I recommend vertical mowing twice a year. All lawns suffer from a build-up of thatch, mosses, turfgrass weeds and poor infiltration rates due to compaction. Cutting at right angles to the surface helps alleviate these issues.

Depending on the depth to which vertical-mower blades penetrate the

turf, the benefits can include;

- Horizontal grass leaf control (which allows light penetration and increased tillering).
- Thatch removal.
- Soil cultivation (aeration).
- Discouraging moss accumulation.

I recommend that mowing should be done regularly rather than spasmodically (which can leave the sward open to weed infestation).

Don't mow too tightly and occasionally use vertical mowing and your lawn will reward you with a pleasing, healthy appearance.