Don’t Bag It™ Lawn Care Program
for Southern Nevada

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The Don’t Bag It™ lawn care program combines mowing with a recycling mower and the use of slow release fertilizers. The result is a beautiful lawn that eliminates the bagging of clippings. Rather they return them to the lawn where they are "composted", recycling nutrients to the grass. The end result is a healthier, richer-looking lawn accomplished with less mowing time. The benefit to the community is a reduction (20 to 50 percent) in the yard waste that is traditionally sent to the public landfills and a reduced chance of contaminating surface waters with excess fertilizers.

The benefits of the program to you are:

- Deep green lawn color
- No bagging of grass clippings
- 38 % less mowing time
- 1/3 to 1/2 less fertilizer needed
- Fertilize less often
- Decreased water use
- Less chance of fertilizer contaminating surface water

However, a careful lawn care program, outlined here, must be followed if the full benefits of the Don't Bag It™ program will be realized. What you need to make the program work for you:

- Mulching or recycling mower or your mower retrofitted with a mulching blade
- Mowing plan that removes no more than 1/3 of the grass blade each mowing
- Applications of moderate amounts of good quality, slow release fertilizers

If the Don’t Bag It™ program is to be successful, closely follow the mowing and fertilizer schedules provided.
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): The Mower

Q. What Is A Recycling (mulching) Mower?
Judging only from outward appearances, conventional and recycling mowers look alike. A recycling mower is different from a conventional mower, however, in two important ways: the design of the blade and deck (housing surrounding the blade) and the bag. The blade and deck are designed to give the grass clippings, once cut, a longer time in the air before they drop to the lawn.
While suspended in the air they are cut multiple times to a fine mulch. These mulched clippings decompose much more rapidly than clippings from a conventional mower. Most of the clippings from an non-retrofitted, conventional mower (used without a bag) lie on the lawn surface, which allows for tracking into the house. Conventional mowers are designed to be used with a bag. Recycling mowers are designed so that the mower has a longer time to chop grass clippings to a fine mulch. Finely chopped clippings easily fall to the ground and disappear. It is wise to remember that there are differences in the performances among recycling mowers. Consult consumer guides to better understand the effectiveness of these mowers.

Q. Do I Have To Buy a New Mower or can I Use the One I Have?
The mower that you use can be a standard recycling mower or your own rotary mower retrofitted with a recycling kit. Most of the research demonstrates that recycling mowers are more effective in mulching grass clippings than conventional mowers that have been retrofitted. However, either will work. In all cases, a sharp mower blade is required. Mulching with reel mowers requires a more frequent mowing plan to facilitate mulching. Sharpen blades at least once a year. Larger lawns may require that mower blades be sharpened more often.

Q. How Much Will It Cost to Retrofit my Mower?
The cost of retrofitting your mower depends on whether you retrofit it yourself or you have it done by a professional. The cost of a recycling blade for a standard push or self-propelled mower will vary from $20 to $40 depending on the make and model. A conventional rotary lawn mower, without retrofitting it, will fail in providing satisfactory results in the Don't Bag It Lawn Care Program.

FAQ: Mowing

The Don't Bag It™ program saves time by not bagging clippings. It leaves the finely pulverized clippings to decay on the soil surface. These decomposing lawn clippings return plant nutrients to the soil that are usually supplied by expensive fertilizers. Lawns on the Don’t Bag It™ program are a deeper, dark green color than those lawns being fertilized by most commercial fertilizers.

Q. Where Do the Clippings Go?
In the Don’t Bag It™ program, grass clippings are not bagged. This accounts for most of the time saved in mowing. The clippings, pulverized by the recycling mower, are left to decay on the soil surface. The decomposing leaf blades return valuable nutrients and organic compounds to the soil that most fertilizers don’t contain. They are used by the lawn for growth.

Q. Won’t the Clippings Left in the Grass Contribute to Thatch Buildup?
No. Thatch is the dead debris in a lawn that is lying on the soil surface. Thatch results from the "sloughing off" of dead and dying roots, stolons, and grass stems; not leaves. Buildup of thatch is attributed to the type of grass, and the amount and frequency of nitrogen fertilizer applications and over irrigation. Finely pulverized grass clippings, like the kind produced by recycling mowers, do not contribute to the buildup of thatch.

Q. How Often Do I Mow?
The Don’t Bag It™ program requires mowing frequently enough so that no more than one third of the leaf blade is removed at any one time. This may vary from 5 to 8 days depending on the type of fertilizer you select, how often you apply it, the effectiveness of the mower, and how fast the grass is growing.

Conventional mowers retrofitted with a mulching blade work satisfactorily under most conditions. However, they have not performed as well as recycling mowers, under extreme mowing conditions, or commercially. Recycling mowers are not effective at mulching clippings when the grass is wet or too long.

**Q. Should I Mow When the Lawn is Wet?**
No. Neither a conventional nor a mulching mower performs well when the grass is wet. Both will become plugged with cut grass, which interferes with the mowing, or works the engine too much. Also the grass under the tires mats down and is not mowed, leaving tall strips of grass in the lawn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mowing Heights of Turfgrass</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommended Grass</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perennial Ryegrass/ Bluegrass</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tall Fescue</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Q. What Should I Do If My Grass is Too Tall and I Have to Remove More Than One Third of the Grass Blade?**
The best solution is to mow twice; once at the highest mower setting and then a couple of days later at the normal setting. Removing more than one third of the leaf blade may cause the root system of grasses to die back and stress it. If the grass is too tall, the first mowing might have to be bagged. The second mowing can be mulched. Some recycling mowers have performed well, according to test reports, even when removing two inches of clippings in one mowing.

**FAQ: Fertilizer Plan**
The type of fertilizer and how often it is applied will affect the color and quality of the lawn and how often it needs to be mowed.

**Q. What Kind of Fertilizer Should I Use?**
The numbers on a fertilizer bag stand for the percentages of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) it contains. We recommend that you use a fertilizer that has percentages of N-P-K in 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 ratios, or ratios close to these percentages. (Examples: 21-7-14, 20-5-10, 16-6-10).

These ratios have generally proven to be the most effective in providing the proper nutrient combination for lawns under most circumstances.

Some fertilizers are classified as "quick-release". Application of these fertilizers can cause "growth spurts" in the lawn corresponding to the application of the fertilizer. "Growth spurts" in the lawn are difficult to manage under the Don’t Bag It™ program because the mowing frequency must increase to correspond to the rapid growth of the lawn.

"Slow-release" fertilizers minimize these "growth spurts". The nitrogen contained in the fertilizer should be in a form that is at least 50 percent slow release. The fertilizer label will indicate the percentage of nitrogen contained in the bag that is slow release.

**Q. How Much Fertilizer Should I Apply?**
Our experience with the Don’t Bag It™ program has shown us that we can apply about half of the amount of fertilizer recommended on the bag. This is because the use of slow-release fertilizers,
along with the nutrients added by recycling the clippings to the lawn, provides the nutrition needed.

When implementing the Don’t Bag It™ program, the nutrients recycled to the lawn in one year are roughly equivalent to a full application of a high quality lawn fertilizer.

**Q. How Often Should I Fertilize My Lawn?**

This depends on the type of lawn grass you have. Tall fescue turfgrass requires fewer fertilizer applications than hybrid and Kentucky bluegrass. Tall fescue and common on the Don’t Bag It™ program will perform nicely with three applications of a good quality fertilizer each year.

Suggested dates for applications of fertilizers to tall fescue would be around the dates of Memorial Day, Thanksgiving and Labor Day. Avoid applying fertilizers to tall fescue during the hot summer months.

Applications of fertilizers for common depend on whether it is overseeded for winter color or not. If it were overseeded with rye for winter color then four applications of fertilizer would be ideal. Unlike tall fescue, should be fertilized during the summer months.

If common is not overseeded then apply fertilizers at least three times during the growing season; Memorial Day, 4th of July and Labor Day. The late fall application of high nitrogen fertilizer to will extend the summer color into the cold, fall weather. A Thanksgiving Day application of fertilizer to without overseeding would be a waste of time and fertilizer.

However, the recent application of a high nitrogen fertilizer to a lawn to be overseeded, prior to overseeding, will interfere with the overseeding process. Hybrid is treated similarly to common except that it may require more frequent fertilizer applications. However, recycling the clippings will compensate for one application of fertilizer. Recommended dates for hybrid, overseeded with rye for winter color, would be Memorial Day, 4th of July, Labor Day (just after overseeding), and Thanksgiving. If hybrid Bermuda is not overseeded, then eliminate the Thanksgiving Day application.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turfgrass</th>
<th>Memorial Day</th>
<th>July 4th</th>
<th>Labor Day</th>
<th>Thanksgiving</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Com. Bermuda</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Overseeded Bermuda</td>
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<td>Tall Fescue</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kentucky Bluegrass</td>
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*Fertilizer used should be a high quality, slow release type with a ratio of 3-1-2 or 4-1-2.*

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