



No Mow May Follow Up for Participants



No Mow May: Follow-up and Considerations

Thank you for participating in No Mow May! The community support for a new lawncare vision that is more conducive to pollinators has been truly inspiring. The presence of early flowering weeds has helped support emerging pollinators, and the longer standing vegetation has helped buffer our lakes and wetlands during the first spring rains.

Heading into June, property owners will need to return to more conventional mowing practices to come back into compliance with City Code. As you make this transition, there are some things to consider regarding how No Mow May could impact your lawn the rest of the year. Depending on the dominant grass species in your lawn, refraining from mowing may require some extra care and a slow return to a regular mowing routine. 2022 has been a largely cold spring, and many lawns can adapt to a period of no mowing followed by a return to mowing. Please read on to be ready and to make informed decisions that are likely to affect how your lawn fares through the late summer months.

How does No Mow May affect the lawn?

- Conventional grass varieties such as Kentucky Bluegrass don't do well if more than 1/3 of the grass blade is cut at a time. Cutting more than 1/3 of the blade cuts into key tissues in the blade of grass. When this happens, the grass spends its energy recovering instead of growing or storing nutrients. This makes the grass more vulnerable to disease and less prepared to bounce back after drought or dormancy. If your grass is struggling in this way, it may require human intervention with fertilizers or other treatments to get it back to its former state.

Does No Mow May affect the larger watershed?

- It depends. When No Mow May ends, there's going to be a large amount of biomass to cut. At any time of year, it's important to keep grass clippings on the lawn and off of paved surfaces. Despite seeming "natural", grass clippings are an excessive nutrient that acts as a pollutant when it drains to a lake, creek, or wetland. There is no treatment between the street and the receiving waterbody, and all that extra nutrient changes the aquatic community towards an unbalanced, turbid, pea-soup green state. This is what VLAWMO and watershed organizations across the State are trying to avoid. When mowing for the first time after a long period of growth, it may be difficult to contain the grass clippings on the lawn, so be sure to plan for extra time to sweep up the clippings to keep those nutrients on the land and out of the water.
- Never dump grass clippings or yard waste into wetlands or ditches – this is a nearly permanent impact on the soil and health of our water resources. It makes waterways clogged with debris, which is an expensive stress on public tax dollars to remedy, and creates soil conditions that are more prone to invasive species. To support a balanced watershed and ecosystem, take grass clippings to a yardwaste facility or dispose of them through a yardwaste hauler service. Ramsey County manages seven yard waste collection sites that accept grass clippings; find information about hours and locations at www.ramseycounty.us/YardWaste.

Things to consider trying to help avoid damaging your lawn:

- Mow in stages, starting as high as the mower can reach. Gradually lower the blade so as not to shock or harm your grass.
- Take a second pass on the same height to help break down the clippings.
- Fertilize based on a soil test, such as soil tests from the U of M. These will guide you to fertilize according to what the grass and the soil need instead of going with a routine.
- If you don't need to fertilize, just keeping the grass clippings on the lawn for a year is about the equivalent to one application of synthetic fertilizer. Mulching leaves in the fall into the lawn (as much as 50% leaf cover at a time) is another source of natural fertilizer. For many lawns this is sufficient, and when paired with a higher mowing height, the grass gets what it needs for going dormant over the winter.
- If you must fertilize, first strive to do so in the late summer/early fall. This is the most efficient time to fertilize because the grass is preparing for winter, gathering nutrients in its roots. Fertilizer applied at this time will go right to the roots and will reduce the amount of extra that washes off the surface. Spring fertilization encourages more blade growth, which either leads to more mowing or the dilemma of a long lawn and not cutting more than 1/3 of the blade.
- Mow higher all year long (3-4" height). Taller leaves in your lawn will help shade the soil surface, which can reduce weed germination. Longer grass means deeper grass roots, which means the grass can store more nutrients and retain more moisture. Increased moisture retention and better soil cover create healthier soil, a more resilient yard that can withstand drought, and benefit the larger watershed.
- Strive for healthy soil through deep roots and introducing more perennial native vegetation. An excess of weeds is really a sign of unhealthy soil, as weeds are the plants that can specialize in those conditions. Increasing soil health is a long-term way to prevent an excess of weeds.
- To build a lawn more conducive to Now Mow May, try integrating fine or tall fescues into your lawn, or explore switching to a lo-mow, no-mow, or bee lawn type of turf altogether. This will allow for flowering weeds such as dandelions yet will maintain a thick, lush cover.
- If you're supportive of a few dandelions but don't want them to get too out of hand, and still want to keep long vegetation, try mowing extra high just to knock the seed heads off. Do this before the weeds have gone to seed to help reduce weed seeds in your soil's seed bank.

For more information, check out these links and resources:

Mowing, yard waste, and other water-friendly home tips: www.vlawmo.org/residents

VLAWMO cost-share landscape grants: www.vlawmo.org/grants

Lawns to Legumes: <http://bwsr.state.mn.us/l2l>

Workshops, turf alternatives, and plant resources: www.bluethumb.org

U of M Turfgrass Science: <https://turf.umn.edu/>