



THATCH - WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

You may hear that “thatch is the enemy of lawns”. And, if you have too much of it, rest assured that is a true statement. An all-to- common belief is that grass clippings contribute to thatch, and turf grass research advancements over the past 50+ years have proven that clippings DO NOT contribute to this problem. This means if you are still routinely bagging, you can save the added mowing time and contribution to the local landfill by not bagging. If clippings are not the problem, what is?



Thatch is an accumulation over time of dead plant material, mostly roots, combined with living roots growing in the **thatch layer**. This layer is the area between the actual soil surface and the living grass intertwined with dead roots. Take a minute to look at the pictures below that shows a clear line between thatch (lighter colored upper brown part) and the darker colored soil below.

One of the easiest ways to suspect a thatch problem is by simply walking on your lawn. If it feels like you are walking on a sponge, then you can investigate further by taking a small shovel and digging out a 4-5 inch soil profile. You will see a difference between the soft, spongy thatch layer and the actual soil surface. The two layers will easily separate with your finger, and more than a ½ inch of thatch is not a good thing because thatch does not hold water or plant nutrients. In other words, while the living roots anchor in the thatch layer, the grass is also starving, and the weakened grass is more susceptible to fungus or insect problems.



Thatch removal is not a pleasant task, but it can be done in a variety of ways. In a small area, a steel thatch rake can be used. For larger areas, dethatching machines also work but the reality is that each pass only removes a small amount of thatch, and if too much is taken out at one time, the living root system also comes out as well. If this is your preferred method and you really want to “rip it up” do this in the fall for bluegrass when you can reseed and in the summer to plug or sod zoysia or bermuda.

VERTICUTTING

A verticutter improves seed to soil contact when seeding. It can remove thatch prior to seeding.

To improve seed to soil contact and if thatch is not an issue:

- ◆ Be sure ground is slightly wet but not saturated- make one pass with the verticutter
- ◆ Apply seed
- ◆ Make second pass with verticutter at approximately right angles to the first pass
- ◆ Apply Ferti-lome New Lawn Starter fertilizer
- ◆ Water

***NOTE- THIS MACHINE DOES NOT REDUCE
COMPACTION AND IS NOT MEANT FOR TILLING!***



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