

Mowing Your Florida Keys Lawn

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Mowing is one of the primary maintenance practices in a Florida Keys lawn. By using the following Florida Yards and Neighborhoods mowing practices developed by L.B. McCarty and John Cisar from the University of Florida, you can improve the overall health and appearance of your lawn.

The main components of proper mowing are:

- Mowing at the proper height for your grass species
- Mowing frequency
- Following good mowing practices

Mowing at the proper height

Mowing at the proper height is very important. Mowing turf too low probably ruins more lawns than any other turf management practice. Grass plants use their green leaf blades for making their own food. Removing too much of the grass blade surface during one mowing will stress the grass and retard growth as it tries to regrow the removed grass blades. Low mowing heights increase insect, disease, and weed attacks and cause faster than normal thatch accumulation.

Therefore, the suggested mowing practices for Florida lawns is as follows:

<u>Grass</u>	<u>Optimal Height (inches)</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Bermuda	3.0 to 4.0	3-5 days
Seashore Paspalum	1.0 to 2.0	5-10 days
St. Augustine	2.5 to 4.0	7-14 days
Zoysia	1.0 to 2.0	10-14 days

You can reduce your water and fertilizer usage since there will be more than enough grass blades to give a good appearance. Also, by reducing the amount of water

applied, plants will develop more extensive root systems and thatch accumulation will be reduced. Other advantages of a high cutting height include better pest tolerance and better survival from environmental stress, such as drought.

Frequency of mowing

The growth rate of the lawn determines how frequently it needs to be mowed. The growth rate is influenced by grass species, weather conditions, and level of management. Slowest growth rates occur in the winter or under low fertility and irrigation, while fastest growth rates occur in the summer or under high fertility and watering practices. Mow often enough so that no more than one-third of the blade height is removed per mowing. For example, if your St. Augustine lawn is mowed at a height of 3 inches it should be mowed when it grows to a height of 4 to 4½ inches. On most lawns, grass clippings should be left on the ground to help recycle nutrients to the soil. If the lawn is mowed frequently enough, clippings cause few problems. Although many people believe that clippings contribute to thatch, research has shown that clippings are readily decomposed by microbial action. Problems with thatch may arise when turf is mowed infrequently and excess clippings (e.g., clumping) result. When this happens, clippings can be raked to distribute them more evenly.

Good mowing practices

Follow these procedures and precautions for safe, good mowing:

- Pick up all stones, sticks, and other debris before mowing to avoid damaging the mower or injuring someone with flying objects.
- Never mow wet turf with a rotary mower because clippings can clog the machine. Mow only when the turf is dry.
- Sharpen the mower blade frequently enough to prevent a ragged appearance to the turf.

- Mow in a different direction every time the lawn is cut. This helps prevent wear patterns, reduces the grain (grass laying over in the same direction), and reduces the possibility of scalping.
- Do not remove clippings. If clumping occurs, distribute these by removing or by lightly raking. A leaf blower can also be used to distribute clippings.
- Check your mower every time it is used. Follow manufacturer's recommendations for service and adjustments.
- Adjust cutting height by setting the mower on a driveway or sidewalk and using a ruler to measure the distance between the ground and the blade.
- Never fill a hot mower with gasoline.
- Always wear heavy leather shoes when mowing the lawn.
- Wash mower after use to reduce rusting and weed seed movement.