

## How Low Can You Mow?

As the temperatures are finally warming up, many people are beginning to get their mowers out and ready to start another season of lawn care. There are some factors to consider when getting ready to start mowing this year to make sure that your lawn care isn't hurting the health of the turf.

First, check your mowing height and set it to the optimum setting for your type of turf. To check your mowing height, park your mower on a flat, hard surface such as a driveway and put the deck in the mowing position (make sure the mower and deck drive are in the off position before working around the deck). Now take a ruler and measure the distance from the surface to the bottom of the deck and record this number. Now raise the mower up by putting it on blocks or ramps and measure the distance between the blade and the bottom of the deck and record this number. Now add those two numbers to determine what your mowing height is currently set at. If the number is not what is recommended for your type of turf, adjust the height as directed in the mower owner's manual. Now to determine what the optimum grass height is for your turf, this should cover the common types of turf grass in our area

- Bermudagrass – 1-2 inches
- Bluegrass – 2-3.5 inches
- Buffalograss – 2-3 inches
- Perennial ryegrass – 2-3 inches
- Tall fescue – 2.5-3.5 inches

How often should you mow? That depends on how fast the grass is growing. The recommended rule of thumb for mowing grass is to never take off more than 1/3 the height of the grass. For example, if you want your buffalograss to be at 2 inches tall, mow it before it gets over 3 inches tall. The benefits of following the "1/3 Rule" include reducing stress on the plants and not having an excess of lawn clippings that would necessitate removal. Grass that is not stressed will produce a deeper, stronger root system and fuller leaves. Also, shorter clippings do not have to be bagged and removed as there is very little dry matter in grass clippings and short clippings can more easily dry out and decompose instead of building up a thatch layer in your lawn.

While your mower is still up on blocks, take the opportunity to sharpen your mower blades. Sharp mower blades are important for not only a clean, even cut on the lawn but also plant health. A sharp blade will leave a clean cut on the leaf instead of the ragged tearing that dull blades leave behind. Clean cuts require less energy for the plant to heal and don't leave behind the whitish hue of dead leaf material that ragged tearing cuts do. Make sure to keep checking and re-sharpening your mower blades as needed throughout the season.

Other considerations include being careful mowing around trees so that you do not injure the bark and open the tree up to potential disease. Also when mowing, try to change up your mowing pattern to catch any grass that might be leaning in the direction you previously mowed. Also, please keep safety in mind when mowing and keep pets and small children inside and away from the area you are mowing.

Hopefully these tips can help you have a beautiful, healthy lawn this coming summer. If you have any questions about this topic or others, feel free to contact the Rawlins County Extension Office.