

Conserving Gasoline in Your Yard

By Ken Rudisill, UF/IFAS-Bay County Horticulture Faculty

With gas prices increasing to over \$4 a gallon these days, there are practical ways to reduce gasoline use in your own backyard.

There are electric, battery and solar powered lawnmowers. There are self-push reel mowers too. Most of us have gasoline powered mowers. On average, it takes one gallon of gasoline to mow an acre. There are approximately 5 million acres of home lawns in Florida. Mowing each of these lawns twenty times per year would result in the use of 100 million gallons of gas per year. That's 400 million dollars at \$4 per gallon gas. These are conservative figures.

Be smart as to where you grow grass. Use grass where it serves a purpose. You may not need a thick stand of grass in every square foot of your landscape. And concentrate your efforts in growing grass, where it wants to grow. For example, our lawn grasses are not very tree tolerant. It's normal for a lawn to decline in close proximity to large trees or groupings of trees. As an older lawn succumbs to tree competition, consider relandscaping in that area. Mulch the area under the tree, plant a shade tolerant groundcover or other shade tolerant plants that do well under trees.

Where you do grow grass, fertilize smart. Lawns need fertilizer. But too much fertilizer, particularly too much nitrogen, results in excessive grass growth. This excessive growth requires more time, money and gasoline to mow.

Most homeowners overdo it with too much nitrogen and too little potassium. Fertilizers with the correct ratios of nitrogen and potassium will produce the right balance of shoot to root growth. Choose a fertilizer such as 15-2-15 or some similar analysis with slow release nitrogen. Fertilize to produce adequate growth and the correct color. If your lawn is a healthy green and you're mowing, mowing, mowing, why add more fertilizer?

Many people choose to overseed their lawns with ryegrass during fall. Weigh the desire to have a green lawn through the winter with the extra time and costs (gas, fertilizer, water, pesticides, etc.) involved with maintaining it. If you want a green lawn without overseeding, try lawn paint. It is a dye that makes the lawn green. It doesn't affect the dormant grass or soil.

Finally, keep your gas powered lawnmower in good working condition. It can make a difference in how efficiently it operates. Make sure the equipment is clean. Change the oil, if needed. Replace or clean the air filter and spark plug. Keep lawnmower blades sharp. Basically, follow the owner's manual for routine maintenance.

Implementing these ideas will help conserve fuel and result in a healthier lawn.

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