



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® of the Fairfax Area

Wanda Wastewatcher Revisited

Your Lawn Can Recycle Itself

by Judy Prochko, E.Q. Committee

Spring is a time most of us look forward to with great anticipation. Here in the Washington area it is probably the prettiest season of the year as the daffodils give way to the dogwood and the dogwood fades to the rhododendron. April showers bring May flowers, and everything is growing, growing... including the grass.

Now, the one thing I do not look forward to doing is mowing the grass. Actually, mowing the grass is not such a task, it's getting the lawn mower engine running and, oh yes, trudging back to my compost pile with the bag of clippings. Now that's real devotion! Even if I did not compost, I would find bagging the clippings to be almost as much of a hassle. Did you know that during the warmer months, grass clippings make up an astounding 17% of solid waste collected in residential areas?

But, good news! Lawn experts are now recommending that grass clippings be allowed to remain on the lawn. Not only do they help the soil retain moisture, but they add nutrients to the soil when they decompose. This means that less fertilizer is needed on your lawn, thereby reducing the nutrients that leach into groundwater. Recycling your grass clippings is the natural way to maintaining a healthy lawn.

To work effectively, mow the grass when it is dry and not too long--no more than an inch--so that clippings can fall through the grass and make contact with the soil. On a sunny day they will decompose within hours. This will not work if you have excessive thatch or when the grass is very dense, a result of over-fertilization. You may wish to follow this advice when the conditions are right and when they are not, to bag or compost your clippings. But, when you do allow your lawn to recycle itself, you will be participating in an environmentally sound practice. Not only will your lawn and the groundwater benefit, but you will be keeping a valuable resource at home rather than being trucked to a landfill or a composting facility many miles away.

As for me, I am elated about this new wisdom. Now I can start up that machine and zing along without having to stop before I am completely finished with the job. Lawn mowing can be a joyous experience after all!