

*This information is provided compliments of Acme Rental Centre (3891 Chatham Street, Richmond) and is for reference only as each lawn is unique onto itself. Please call Martin at 604-271-3014 to discuss your personal lawn needs.*

### **What is thatch?**

Thatch is the layer of built-up plant material between the green top growth and the roots of grass plants. Thatch develops naturally as lawn grasses grow and slough off roots, shoots and leaves. Some thatch helps protect the roots, but excessive thatch prevents moisture, oxygen and nutrients from penetrating the soil.

You can leave your grass clippings on the surface of the lawn after you mow. In order to prevent the buildup of thatch, mow frequently so the grass clippings are small and will decompose rapidly. Grass clippings contain 16 essential nutrients--including nitrogen fertilizer you've applied -- that can be recycled back into the lawn by leaving the clippings in place.

One problem with a thick layer of thatch is that newly sown seed will root in the thatch layer -- not the soil. Thatch doesn't provide the same insulation as soil, so the roots of such plants dry out quickly, and the lawn dies. A heavily thatched lawn dries out faster so you have to water more frequently.

To determine whether your lawn has too much thatch, remove a plug of lawn, and measure the layer of thatch between the top growth and the root zone. If it measures more than 1/2" in depth, you should dethatch the lawn. You may need to perform this chore only once every two to three years.

After getting rid of the thatch, you can compost it and recycle it back into the garden. You can remove thatch in summer, fall and even when the lawn is dormant in winter. Dethatching isn't recommended during the transition between dormancy and active growth because at this time the energy and nutrient stores in grass roots are low.

### **How do you dethatch a lawn?**

When thatch has accumulated to an excessive thickness, it is best reduced by mechanical means. Dethatcher machines known as vertical mowers, dethatchers or power rakes have vertically spinning blades which pull some of the material to the surface as they slice the thatch layer. Acme Rental Centre has dethatching machines available for renting. Mechanical dethatching should be done in either late summer or fall when cool weather prevails.

**Caution!** DO NOT attempt to remove the entire thatch layer in one treatment; DO NOT dethatch when soil is wet; only dethatch your lawn when it is needed rather than on a routine basis. You can also topdress your lawn after dethatching with about 1/8 inch of topsoil similar to the soil underlying the turf. Topdressing helps even out bumpiness and fill in holes left from dethatching and/or aerating. Topdressing is usually only necessary in special cases, however, and using the wrong topdressing material can be more detrimental than the benefit of evening a bumpy turf area. Do not topdress with a different type of soil. A dissimilar soil will not mix well enough with the underlying soil.

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Other maintenance practices which discourage thatch build-up are frequent mowings to maintain the grass at a height of 2 1/2 inches, keeping clippings on the lawn, reducing nitrogen fertilization and amending the soil with phosphorus, potassium, and lime according to a soil nutrient analysis.

In addition to dethatching, the lawn should be aerated and limed if necessary. Lime and aeration stimulate bacterial decomposition by improving air, water and nutrient relationships. Acme Rental Centre also rents aerators.