

Dethatching Lawns

If after raking your lawn or after a lawn mowing your lawn looks thin and has a distinctive appearance of a brownish color instead of a nice lush green, the cause could be due to excessive thatch.

A thatch layer is composed of matted decaying organic materials such as dead roots, small twigs, and grass clippings. Beneficial insects, worms and bacteria live in the thatch slowly breaking it down. The thatch layer helps retain moisture, keeps the soil cool, and protects the base of the grass from damage.

When the layer of thatch gets too thick nutrients, moisture and oxygen cannot penetrate through the layer quickly enough to nourish the grass. The lawn in its weakened state is more susceptible to disease, harmful insects and fungus.

To check the thatch layer cut a 2"X2" area of sod about 4" deep from your lawn. Remove the soil from the roots. Look at the layer between the roots and the green blades. It is brownish in color, full of decaying grass, dead plant material and small twigs. It feels spongy if you squeeze it. This layer is the thatch layer.

If it's under 1/2" thick that's great.

If it is over 1/2" thick the lawn should be dethatched to remove most of this layer. A power dethatcher is better suited to this task.

A power dethatcher is equipped with a rotating roller having sets of knives at a preset distance apart and at a preset depth. As the dethatcher travels the knives rotate quickly slicing into the thatch layer, lifting up the thatch and depositing it on the surface of the grass. The deposited material is then raked and collected. It can be placed in your compost or taken to a compost facility. Some beneficial thatch will remain in the lawn.

A balanced fertilizer may be applied after dethatching. Any bare or thin spots can be topdressed and overseeded. A normal watering will also help the grass recover.

Dethatching is better done in spring or fall.

Benefits should start showing about 3 weeks after dethatching as the lawn begins to thicken and develops its rich green color.