

Planning before you plant key to good landscaping

Dear John:

We're landscaping our yard this year. Any tips to make mowing easier?

Do-It-Myselfer

Dear Do-It-Yourselfer:

You're starting out on the right foot by planning before you plant. If you landscape correctly in the first place, you can eliminate difficult mowing areas and save time on trimming.

First, you'll need to draw a diagram of your property. Include the lawn, sidewalks, trees, shrubs, gardens and house. Then mark all of the sharp corners, slopes and tiny areas with a highlighter or different colour pencil.

If you fill in these difficult mowing spots with a decorative groundcover, you can avoid them altogether.

And if you have trees on your lawn, here's another time-saving tip.

Remove a circle of grass from around the tree trunk, then fill in the circle with attractive wood chips, bark mulch or groundcover so you can mow around the tree easily.

Be sure to leave plenty of space for your lawnmower to get between fully-grown trees and bushes. Remember, the small shrub

John Deere

Answers your lawn and garden woes

you plant this season will turn into a large bush in a couple of years.

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Dear John:

My sister who lives down South cuts her grass much shorter than I do. Should I lower my cutting height, too? What's the correct mowing height?

Baffled Brother

Dear Baffled Brother:

Ideal cutting heights vary from one variety of grass to another, and mowing heights can vary considerably according to climate.

In the North, cutting heights for cool-season grasses can vary from three-quarters of an inch to four inches depending on the variety of grass. Generally, cut cool-season grasses at 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches.

Some cool-season grasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, ryegrass or tall fescue, won't tolerate mowing below one inch.

If you have any of these varieties in your lawn, you should maintain a cutting height between three and four inches.

A general rule for cutting cool-season grasses is to keep the mowing height at the maximum recommended level during hot weather.

However, always observe the one-third rule and mow off no more than one-third of the grass blade during a single mowing. The one-third rule helps your lawn maintain a vigorous root system.

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Dear John:

My teenagers will be mowing the lawn for the first time this spring. Are there any special instructions to give them?

Mothering Nature

Dear Mothering Nature:

The first thing you should give your teens is the operator's manual for your mower. Have them read it thoroughly so they know how the machine works before starting the engine.

Like a car, a mower is a powerful

machine that should be under the control of a responsible person who knows proper use and safety information.

Before mowing, have them pick up any tools, sticks, stones or other debris on the lawn. The mower blade, whirling at high speeds, can throw overlooked objects a long distance in any direction.

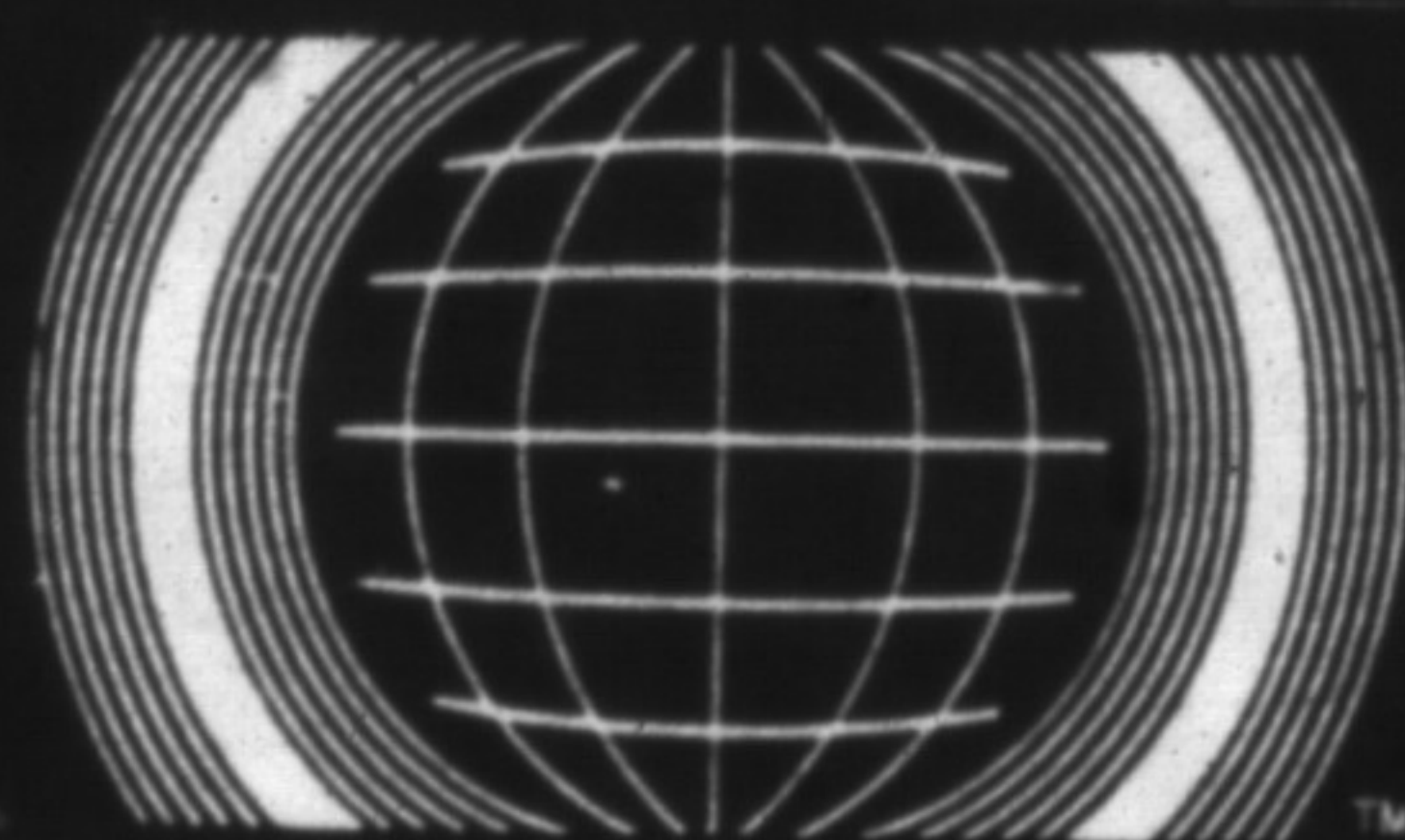
Also, remind your teenagers to get children and pets inside the house to make sure they won't unexpectedly run in front of the mower's path. If they have to add gasoline to the mower, remind them not to do it while the engine is running or hot.

Once they're familiar with the controls and functions of the equipment, stand nearby to offer immediate assistance for the first few mowings.

If the chute gets jammed, demonstrate how to disconnect the spark plug and remove the clog with a stick or gardening tool.

They should always keep their hands away from the mower deck — even if they think the blade isn't engaged.

By teaching your teens these safety tips, you can help prevent bad mowing habits before they lead to an accident.



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