

Psssst! Want a good buy on a lawnmower? Puget Sound environmental quality agencies have a deal for you. It's called the "Get Mower for Less" event. Area residents can purchase mowers at up to 50 percent off the retail price and recycle their old gas-powered mowers.

Locations are April 2 at Cheney Stadium Parking Lot in Tacoma, April 8 at Marymoor Park's Interpretive Parking Lot in Redmond, and April 9 at Paine Field, Snohomish County Airport in Everett. All events run from 9 AM to 3 PM and include mower demonstrations and sales, information booths on natural lawn care, a recycling site for old gas-powered mowers, and plenty of free parking. Last year's events sold 5,000 mowers. Organizers suggest arriving early.

Event coordinators say, "Each Puget Sound-area household that bags grass clippings contributes almost half a ton of yard waste to composting facilities. That's half a ton of nutrient- and moisture-rich material that could feed and protect a lawn all summer." Mowers available are mulching mowers that automatically cut super-fine clippings and blow them down into the turf. The clippings fertilize the lawn, protect it from evaporation and reduce the need for chemical fertilizers. Research shows that lawns maintained with "grasscycling" mulching mowers need an average of one-third less fertilizer and 300 fewer gallons of water per year. Experts also say that the mulching does not produce thatch.

Those who mow lawns will appreciate that mulching mowers save 40 percent in mowing time: no stopping, unloading the bag and restarting. Event attendees will find lawnmowers manufactured by Toro, Lawnboy, and Black & Decker, and manual push mowers by American Lawn Company, Brill and Husqvarna. More information about this event can be obtained by calling 1-800-RECYCLE or visit the website at <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/swd/resrecy/grasscyc.htm>.

While we're on the subject of lawns let's explore this topic a bit more. In addition to all the great mail I receive from readers I also get press releases from various gardening organizations and retailers. April is National Lawn Care Month. Now, I'm not really a good person to talk to about lawns because we don't even have one. And, additionally, when we learned about lawns in Master Gardener School the three words I latched onto were, "Don't plant lawns." But I do admit they're very pretty when well-designed and ecologically maintained. And if you have kids or dogs (or both) lawns are a must. Kids definitely need lawns to romp and roll on. Wait a minute – maybe we don't want to mix kids and dogs with lawns and rolling. Oops, I think I'm digressing.

The Professional Lawn Care Association of America who exist to sell lawn care services to us consumers says, "Benefits of lawns are: Oxygen: 625 square feet of lawn provides enough oxygen for one person for an entire day. Temperature: On a block of eight average houses, front lawns have the cooling effect of 70 tons of air conditioning. Pollution: Turf absorbs gaseous pollutants such as carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide, converting them to oxygen. Dust and Dirt: Turf traps an estimated 12 million tons of dust and dirt released annually into the atmosphere. Fire Retardation: A buffer zone of grass around buildings helps retard the spread of fire. Water Quality: Turf prevents soil erosion, filters contaminants from rainwater and reduces runoff." If you want to learn more from PLCCA visit their web site at www.plcaa.org.

Facts provided by the PLCAA were interesting so I thought I'd share them with you. But I would also caution you to be careful when hiring a lawn service. Be sure you know what kinds of chemicals they will use on your lawn. Find a company that uses equipment like the mulching mowers described in the previous paragraphs. Conscientious gardeners need to be sure their gardening practices are also earth-friendly practices. Enough said.

The true secrets for a healthy lawn are: at least six inches of good organic, well draining, soil as a base; the right grass seed for the use the lawn will have; and just the right amounts of sun and water. If you're beginning to plan a new lawn or if you have lawns with problems (especially the dreaded moss problem) be sure to visit either the County Extension Office in Port Orchard or a Master Gardener Clinic throughout the county. Publications are available for purchase (usually under two dollars) on every aspect of growing healthy lawns in our area.

You can email Peg with your gardening questions or comments at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or write in care of the Herald.