

# LAWN, FARM AND GARDEN

## Making the Most of Small Space

For gardeners everywhere, finding enough landscape to start your dream garden is often a big hurdle to clear. Unless you live on a farm or own a large amount of property, your landscape is likely more limiting than you'd prefer.

But a lack of landscape doesn't mean you can't have the lush garden you've always dreamed of. Instead, it simply means you'll have to pull a few tricks out of your gardener's cap to get the most out of the land you do have.

Use containers: Container gardening has grown especially popular in recent years, as the size

of most people's yards has shrunk thanks to more building throughout the country's suburban neighborhoods. Plant whatever you'd like in containers, which take up less space than a traditional garden and also offer more flexibility, as the containers can be moved around at will. Consider the color: Much like the paint you choose for a room can give the illusion of that room being bigger or smaller than it really is, the color of your garden can offer a similar illusion. The color blue is known for making gardens look larger than they are, so keep these cooler colors at the back of the garden to give the impression that they are

more distant. Consult with a local gardening professional, be it your landscaper or a salesman at a nearby gardening supply store, for advice on what plants will best match your needs.

Build up, rather than out: A raised bed for your garden won't take up as much space, but will still allow you enough room for an attractive, landscaped

complementing garden. Some can even be built atop moveable structures, making them similar to container gardening with respect to their flexibility.

While it might have been a chore most would have liked to avoid when they were kids or teenagers, for landscape enthusiasts mowing the lawn can be an enjoyable activity. Whether you're a fan of ride-on lawn mowers or you prefer the traditional push mower, an afternoon spent mowing the lawn can be good exercise and a way to catch a few rays.

Of course, once the job is done, what to do with the grass clippings can present a genuine problem. Some states, in fact, have banned yard waste such as clippings, branches and leaves from their landfills. For local governments, this decision was largely rooted in budgetary

concerns, as many communities facing cutbacks decided that yard waste collection was something they could live without, and therefore cut these programs out of their budgets. While there are many reasons why you might have left many residents unhappy with their local government, yard waste is actually a valuable commodity. In fact, many homeowners save money if used correctly.

**How Do Clippings Benefit a Yard?**  
When returned to the yard, grass clippings can pay numerous dividends. First and foremost, grass

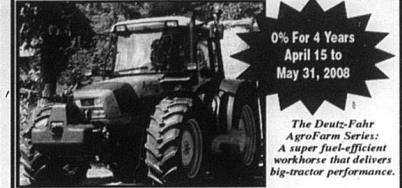
clippings can help homeowners save money on fertilizer. Clippings contain valuable levels of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, and can help cut fertilizer needs by up to 25 percent.

In addition, clippings work as a food source for bacteria in the soil. One of the things bacteria does is decompose harmful and unsightly sludge, improving the lawn's health and increasing its aesthetic appeal.

**How Much Should I Leave?**  
If you're going to be returning clippings to your yard, you'll need to make adjustments to your mower and your mowing schedule. Most mowers have a lever that would like to set their blades as low as possible to reduce the number of times they'll have to mow the lawn, this is not healthy for your yard. Mow grass tall with a sharp blade so that no more than one inch of grass is removed each time the lawn is cut. If you set the blades too low, the clippings will pile up and this will damage the yard. Also, cutting grass too low does not encourage root growth and promotes inefficient use of water. When grass is cut at the correct

height, roots grow more extensively, which helps make the yard more resistant to drought.  
During the season of rapid growth (typically spring), you might need to mow twice per week. While this might sound like a chore, it won't be as hard as it sounds. That's because if a lawn is mowed properly at the correct height, the job gets easier and doesn't take much time at all. As the lawn begins to grow less rapidly, you can return to the typical cutting schedule.

**Can Clippings Be Used Elsewhere?**  
Clippings can be used as mulch and in a compost pile. When using clippings for either process, however, be sure to mix in other ingredients. Grass clippings, when they're not spread out over a lawn but collected in a pile, will produce a very foul odor. However, when mixed with leaves or wood chips, the odor will dissipate. Also, by mixing with wood chips and leaves, you're reducing the thickness of the clippings, which will allow more oxygen to get into the soil.



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## Clippings Are a Lawn's Best Friend

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## Mowing Outside? Keep Kids Indoors!

With lawn-mowing season in full swing, it's time to be aware of the potential for accidents involving children and riding mowers. As an adult, it's your responsibility to teach children that riding mowers are potentially dangerous machines and not toys. Tell them you have a family safety rule about riding mowers: When they can hear the mower running, they have to be inside until the job is done. Children are naturally curious about machines, and they move quickly. The safest place for them to be is inside, under adult supervision. Never give a child a ride on a riding mower, even with the blades off. A riding mower is NOT a fun ride, but a machine with rotating blades that may cause serious injuries. After being given a ride, a child might run out for another one while you are mowing and you might not hear or see the child anywhere. He or she might slip and fall into the

path of a mower, dart out from behind an object or be playing behind the mower, unseen by you. These situations can lead to serious, life-altering accidents. If children or others are near, stop mowing and turn off the engine. Look back and behind you before and while backing up to avoid accidents. When finished mowing, always store and lock the riding mower and keys away from children, and never allow a child to play on or around a riding mower. Riding mower blades rotate at speeds of 200 miles per hour. You wouldn't let a child operate a food processor, so do likewise, keep children away from a riding mower.

For more information about riding mower and other outdoor power equipment safety, visit the Web site of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's Education, Research & Foundation, [www.opel.org/foundation](http://www.opel.org/foundation).



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