



How We Mow Lawns in Rockford, IL

Henry's Lawn Care step-by-step mowing guide · Rockford, Loves Park & Machesney Park

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This is the checklist our crew works through on every mowing visit in Rockford, Loves Park and Machesney Park. We wrote it down for two reasons. If you're a customer, you can see exactly what you're paying for. If you mow your own yard, you can use it too.

It's written for the cool-season grasses that make up nearly every lawn in Winnebago and Boone County — Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass and fescue. A lot of the mowing advice online is written for warm-season grass in the South. It doesn't apply here.

1. Walk the yard first

Before the mower starts, we walk the property. Sticks, rocks, toys, dog waste, hoses, sprinkler heads — anything a blade can throw or a wheel can crush. We look for standing water and soft ground, and we note newly seeded patches and exposed tree roots so we can go around them.

If the grass is wet, we wait. Wet grass clumps, cuts unevenly, tears instead of shears, and it's slippery on slopes. A mow that's a day late looks far better than a mow that's a day early.

2. Set the mowing height for the season

SEASON	HEIGHT WE CUT AT
Spring growth (April–May)	3 to 3½ inches
Normal summer conditions	3½ inches
Hot or dry spells	3½ to 4 inches
Fall growth (September–October)	3 to 3½ inches
Final cut of the year	About 3 inches

[University of Illinois Extension](#) recommends 2½ to 3 inches for most lawns, and up to 3½ for tall fescue. We deliberately run taller than that through summer. Taller grass shades the soil, keeps the roots cooler, holds moisture longer and crowds out crabgrass. On the heavier soils around Rockford that difference shows up fast in July.

3. Never take more than a third

One rule beats all the others: don't cut off more than one-third of the blade in a single mow.

- To keep a lawn at 3 inches, mow when it reaches about 4½.
- To keep it at 3½ inches, mow when it reaches about 5¼.

If a lawn has got away on someone — a vacation, two wet weeks, a new customer whose last guy stopped showing up — we don't scalp it back in one visit. We raise the deck, take the top off, and bring it down over the next two or three cuts. Cutting too much at once shocks the grass, opens the soil up to weeds and leaves heavy clumps everywhere.

4. Mow the main lawn

Two passes around the outside first, where there's room. Then straight, slightly overlapping lines across the middle — enough overlap that we're not leaving strips of uncut grass. We slow right down around trees, beds, slopes and tight corners, and we don't keep pivoting on the same spot, because that's how bare patches start.

The discharge chute always points away from people, cars, the house, flower beds and the street.

5. Change direction every week

- Week 1: north to south
- Week 2: east to west
- Week 3: diagonal
- Week 4: the opposite diagonal

Mowing the same way every time wears ruts, compacts the soil and trains the grass to lean over. Rotating the pattern is also why the stripes in [our mowing gallery](#) look the way they do.

6. Trim what the mower can't reach

String trimmer for fence lines, tree trunks, mailboxes, retaining walls, bed edges, the house and utility boxes. We keep the trimmer level with the mower cut so there's no step between the two.

What we don't do is ring-bark young trees, chew up siding or scalp the grass down to dirt along the fence. That's the number one giveaway of a rushed job.

7. Edge the hard surfaces

Sidewalks, driveways, curbs and patios. A clean, narrow edge — not a trench. On an established lawn the edge only needs a light touch most visits, so we don't dig it out every week just to look busy.

8. Deal with the clippings

We mulch the clippings back into the lawn when three things are true: the grass is dry, we've followed the one-third rule, and they're spread evenly. Clippings are around 75 to 80 percent water, break down within days and put nitrogen back into the soil. Illinois Extension is clear on this one: [clippings do not cause thatch](#).

We bag or disperse them only when growth has been excessive, the grass was damp, or there are visible piles left on the turf.

9. Blow off and check the property

Sidewalks, driveway, patio, beds and curb blown clean. Clippings go back onto the lawn, never into the street or the storm drain, because that's where the Rock River starts. Any clumps get raked out. Then gates shut, anything we moved goes back where it was, and one last look around before we leave.

10. Look after the mower

Sharp blades are the difference between grass that's cut and grass that's torn. A dull blade leaves pale, frayed tips that brown off within a day or two and invite disease. We check blades constantly, scrape the deck, check tire pressure and deck height, and go over belts, filters, oil and guards.

If we've been on a lawn with a disease problem or a weed we don't want to spread, the equipment gets cleaned before the next property.

The Rockford mowing calendar

WHEN	WHAT WE DO
Late March – April	First mow once the grass is actively growing and the ground has firmed up.
May – June	Weekly. In a wet spring some lawns need cutting more often than that to stay inside the one-third rule.
July – August	Deck goes up, frequency comes down. We don't mow dormant grass just because it's Tuesday.
September – October	Back to regular cuts as things cool off. Manageable leaf fall gets mulched into the lawn.
Late October – November	Mow as needed until growth stops. Last cut around 3 inches, and heavy leaf cover cleared so it doesn't smother the grass over winter.

The National Weather Service puts Rockford's average last spring freeze at April 27 and the average first fall freeze at October 13, with big swings either way in any given year. We go by what the grass and the ground are doing, not the calendar.

What we do in a summer drought

When a lawn starts holding footprints, turns a dull blue-gray and stops growing, it's short on water. Our drought routine:

1. Raise the deck to 3½ to 4 inches.
2. Mow less often.
3. Skip the hottest part of the afternoon.
4. Leave fully dormant grass alone.
5. If you're watering, water deeply in the early morning and count the rain that has already fallen. Illinois Extension recommends no more than about an inch a week for a lawn you're keeping green, and only a

quarter to half an inch every few weeks for one you've let go dormant. That's enough to keep the crowns alive.

6. Keep foot traffic, pets and vehicles off dormant turf.

Pick one: keep it green all summer, or let it go dormant and leave it alone. Pushing a lawn in and out of dormancy is what does the real damage.

A note on fertilizer and weed control

Everything on this page is mowing. Fertilizer, weed killer, grub control and disease treatments are a separate job with separate rules. In Illinois, anyone applying pesticides for hire — and that includes lawn weed control — needs a [license from the Illinois Department of Agriculture](#). If someone offers to spray your lawn, ask to see it.

Rockford mowing questions we get asked

When should I start mowing in Rockford?

Usually the second half of April, once the grass is actively growing and the ground is firm enough to take a mower without rutting. Some years it's early April, some years it's May.

How short should I cut my grass in Rockford?

3 to 3½ inches in spring and fall, 3½ to 4 inches in summer. Never below about 3 inches on a bluegrass or fescue lawn. A short lawn looks neat for a day and then burns off.

Should I bag my clippings?

Not normally. Dry, evenly spread clippings feed the lawn and don't cause thatch. Bag only when the grass was long or wet and it has left clumps behind.

Do you keep mowing during a drought?

We keep coming, but we mow higher and less often, and we won't cut grass that has gone fully dormant. Cutting dormant turf does damage that shows for the rest of the season.

Rather we did it?

That's most of our customers. Weekly or every-two-weeks [lawn mowing](#) across Rockford, Loves Park, Machesney Park, Belvidere, Cherry Valley, Winnebago and Roscoe — edges trimmed, clippings cleared, gates shut, every visit. [Get a free quote](#) or call [\(224\) 454-9511](#).

Sources: University of Illinois Extension, [Mowing Your Lawn](#), [Watering Your Lawn](#), [Managing Lawns During Drought](#) and [Managing Thatch in Lawns](#). National Weather Service Chicago, [last spring freeze](#) and [first fall freeze](#) normals for Rockford (1991–2020). Illinois Department of Agriculture, [pesticide certification and licensing](#).

Henry's Lawn Care

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