



How to get along with the Lawn Guy

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Since I am both a gardener and the guy who cuts the lawn, I perhaps have a unique perspective on how gardeners might coexist peacefully with their resident lawn guy. I suppose I should say 'lawn person' because sometimes its not a guy, but for the sake of simplicity, lets just call this person the 'lawn guy'.

Most gardeners think of the lawn as an indestructible encroacher. But the lawn guy knows that grass is fragile in many ways. It is under constant attack from insects, diseases, and weeds. He prefers to deal with these issues quietly and as a consequence the gardener may not hear too much about them. There is one thing the gardener can do to help the lawn guy with his struggle. Gardeners can refrain from putting anything from the garden on the grass such as piles of weeds, buckets, fallen branches and most importantly, stones. Many of these things, even if left for a short time, cut out the light and suffocate the lawn weakening a patch of turf under them and the grass then has to recover. More importantly, these objects interrupt the flow of lawn cutting, so that they have to be removed in mid operation. They are most likely going to end up back on the garden anyway, so they might as well stay there in the first place.

There are two ways to cut a lawn. The first way is to cut so that the cuttings are blown over the lawn. The second way is to cut so that the cuttings spew onto the garden. In the spirit of harmony, I recommend the first way. Better still, use a mulching mower and send the cuttings back into the lawn. There is then no need to rake up cuttings and they help feed the turf.

Gardeners often look on the lawn as a place to put more gardens. Inevitably, in the quest for more plants, the garden runs out of space and in the gardener's mind, turf is expendable. On the other hand, nothing is as able to take foot traffic like a lawn. Nothing is more calming than a lawn. Golf courses are covered with them, to calm the golfers' jangled nerves. Gardeners should think like sculptors or painters when designing. Think of lawns as the negative space in the garden which is necessary to draw attention to the layout of the beds.

One way that the lawn guy could help keep the peace is to get involved in edging. We have had a number of tours of our garden and have learned that clean edges and paths are the high priority during our preparations for the event because they get noticed. About twice a year, the place where grass meets garden needs to be straightened. Being involved in edging means that the lawn guy has some control over what I like to call "gradual encroachment". There are all kinds of edging materials on the market made of plastic, rubber or cement but they are not as cost efficient and do not work as well as a simple 3 or 4 inch ditch cut at the edge forming a moat that turf has difficulty crossing. You can cut

this with a sharp spade or edger. Because we have miles of edges in our garden, we use an electric cutter called an 'Edgehog' that cuts a smooth line quickly. Whichever method you use, you then have to crawl around pulling the excess grass out with a hand fork but getting involved with this process will score a lot of points with the gardener.

As the summer progresses, plants get larger, sometimes flopping over onto the lawn. It is not a good strategy for the gardener to plant these floppy plants at the edge of the garden in the vain hope that the garden will have to expand to accommodate. The lawn guy will just assume that such a plant, as part of its cultural requirements, needs to be periodically sheared.

There are a few plants that forget that their place is in the garden. They try to make a break for it out into the lawn and Bugle Weed is one of the worst. You would think the name of this traveler would give gardeners a hint not to plant it too close to the edge, but Bugle Weed is short and short things tend to get put near the front. Unfortunately, the technique of cutting it with the lawnmower does not work on this little devil, because it hugs the ground as it sneaks through blades of grass.

A useful tool in skilled hands is the 'wiper-snipper' or 'weed-whacker' but gardeners regard these devices with unnatural suspicion. The lawn guy should not foster this distrust of 'weed-whackers' by using them to trim around the base of trees. Instead trees should have a thin mulch around them. Then the lawnmower can then run over the edge of the mulch instead. I would also avoid using the 'wiper-snipper' to trim the garden edges. Even though lawn guys have the skill necessary to do this effectively, the operation makes gardeners unnecessarily nervous. The garden beds can be shaped so that the lawnmower cuts to the edge without having to do extra trimming.

Lawn guys tend to like powered devices, but the blower is one that has few redeeming qualities. It is used to clean leaves and clippings off the lawn which is a job that is usually unnecessary. It is better to mulch them in with the lawnmower. Blowers disturb the peace of the neighbourhood with their racket. They might as well be abandoned in favour of the quiet zen act of sweeping the driveway. You can also feel good about the sacrifice, because it will be reducing your ecological footprint.

I hope these few hints will help create a better understanding between lawn guys and gardeners.

Previously published in the Peterborough Examiner.