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**News release – For immediate release April 11, 2008**

400 words

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## Save gas, sharpen your mowing practices

**Simple steps save gas and help you have a healthy lawn with fewer chemicals.**

ITHACA, N.Y. – If you want a good-looking yard while protecting the environment, here are four simple mowing practices that can help transform your lawn:

1. **Raise your mower blades** to the highest setting, or about 3 inches. Taller grass builds strong roots and competes better with weeds.
2. **Mow often when the lawn is actively growing.** Take only about 1/3 of the grass blade each time you mow to minimize plant stress and maximize health.
3. **Leave grass clippings on the lawn.** Recycling nutrients in the cut grass back into your soil will reduce your need for additional fertilizers.
4. **Keep mower blades sharp,** it cuts your gas use by 25 percent. Clean cut grass is stronger and more resistant to pests.

“Our consumer lawn care survey last year showed that many savvy lawn owners are using good mowing practices – **except** when it comes to sharpening their mower blades,” says Lori Bushway, Senior Extension Associate in the Department of Horticulture at Cornell University.

The ragged edges left by dull blades turn grass tips brown, making the lawn appear diseased, she adds. A once-a-month mower-blade touch up is all it takes to make the brown tips disappear. But don’t wait that long to sharpen if you hit rocks or other blade-blunting objects.

Keeping blades sharp doesn’t have to be an expensive or time-consuming chore, either. Bushway suggests two different approaches:

**Get professional help:** Most small engine repair shops will sharpen your blades for about \$3 to \$6.

**Do it yourself:** If the blades aren’t badly nicked, it’s not hard to touch up the edges:

- With the gas tank empty, disconnect the spark plug wire, then remove the blade.
- Secure the blade in a vise. Run a metal file along the cutting edge, or use a cordless drill with a small grinding-stone attachment. Avoid removing more metal from one end of the blade than the other.
- Check the balance: Suspend the blade from a screwdriver inserted through the center hole. If the blade tips one way, remove more metal from the heavier side.
- Re-attach the blade securely, then the spark plug wire. Gas up and you’re ready to mow sharp.

With either approach, you could purchase several blades, change them regularly, and sharpen them all in one session on a rainy day or over winter.

For more lawn care tips, visit [www.gardening.cornell.edu/lawn](http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/lawn)

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