

Jody Holthaus, Agent  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Livestock and Natural Resources

Jody's will be sent later. Thanks.

David Hallauer, Agent  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Crop and Soils, Horticulture

## **The Lawn Got Away From Me! What Now?!**

In an ideal world, as soon as the lawn reached an appropriate height, we'd get out the mower, remove one third of that height according to the one third rule, and wait for it to return to mowing height again. Unfortunately, Mother Nature is just a tad more variable than that!

What typically happens is the lawn reaches a height half again taller than we ever intended, leaving us to try and figure out what height we should be at now! Fortunately, there is at least a little flexibility when it comes to mowing height!

If a consistent one third removal can't be attained, you are probably best to set your mower as high as possible and bring it down in steps to an appropriate height. You might well cut off more than a third of the grass blade height, but mowing more often and bringing the height down gradually until you reach your target height is probably the best option for the turf.

Mowing height is important because of the way grass plants respond to removal. When a grass plant grows, it does so from stored energy in roots until it has enough leaves to support energy production that replenishes root reserves. If you remove too much leaf area, the plant reacts by pulling stored energy reserves from roots to quickly send up new growth. That may work fine until insect or disease or drought stress kicks in. If the plant has too few energy reserves when stress hits, the grass will likely not respond well and the stand can start to thin.

While a good fertility and mowing program often helps combat these issues, continued removal that results in thinning can quickly lead to weed pressure and other cultural issues that become very difficult to stay ahead of – particularly if the one third rule continues to be exceeded. For best results, always return to the one third removal rule. A thick, healthy stand will in many cases take care of weed issues by itself. Mowing management is a big part of encouraging that healthy stand.

Cindy Williams, Agent  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Food and Nutrition, FNP

## **Beating Summer Boredom**

“I’m bored”.....is a frequently heard statement heard by parents and caregivers this time of year. It is the beginning of summer, and with school being out for a while many children become bored without the daily structure of going to school and seeing friends on a daily basis. This time can be stressful for parents, but with some planning parents can offer some simple activities as well as teach children how to occupy themselves with activities that require little supervision.

1. Art activities are always good time fillers. Keep a box of art supplies available filled with scissors, paper, fabric scraps, beads, crayons, markers, felt, glue, paints and brushes, stickers, canvass, needle and thread, yarn. Art projects can be a good way for children to express creativity, use their imagination and make something useful. The bonus is that art projects can occupy large slots of time depending on the project.

2. Encourage imaginative play. A box of old clothes, hats, jewelry or costumes can evoke hours of play. This is especially fun for pre-school and early elementary children.

3. Do you have children too young for paying jobs but not so easily entertained with an art box? Help them become involved in community service. Does a neighbor need help with some household tasks such as window washing or planting flowers? Maybe a rest home resident would like some company? Perhaps, a community organization could use some volunteer help to fold newsletters or help with a project. These types of activities help children develop compassion and a sense of responsibility.

4. Water play is always fun especially on a hot summer day. Supervision of course is needed. Other than going to the pool, some fun useful water activities might be to wash the car or bicycle or wash the dog or even wash the porch or driveway. Running a sprinkler for the kids to run through or setting up a slip and slide can also be great fun.

5. Summer is a good time for children to learn how to do household tasks. Encourage your children to help you do the chores such as cooking, sewing, or cleaning with you. Yes, it does mean that you will need to allow additional time and energy to help the children learn what to do. Start by finding small jobs that your child can do with you. Older kids need to learn how to do laundry, how to make a grocery list and other practical skills. Many will get into helping, especially if they feel like they’re accomplishing something.

6. Summer is a good time to explore the outdoors. If you have a backyard encourage the children to spend time playing in the yard especially in late afternoon when the sun is not directly overhead. (Don’t forget the sun screen and insect repellent.) Don’t have a playhouse? Set up a backyard tent. It can be a good place to have picnic or talk with friends and siblings.

7. Sometimes, especially with younger children, cries of boredom are really calls for companionship and attention. Find simple, fun things for you and your children to do such as going to the park to swing on the swings, playing cards or a board game, reading aloud, or taking a walk or bicycle ride. Allow the children to decide what the activity may be.

Sometimes being bored is actually a good thing. Children need to understand what real boredom is. Many times children will say they are bored when they simply do not want to engage or participate in an activity. They complain that it is not fun or otherwise interesting. Children need to learn that they can change it and stop being bored and that they have the ability to actively make situations better. In other words, once they recognize they are bored they need to know they can do something more fun and know what that fun thing might be based on their interests.

Professor Dianne Levin, Ph.D., from Wheelock College describes a troubling trend seen in children today who say they are frequently bored, jump from on activity to the next, having trouble figuring out how to play when given open ended activities, and having a difficult time solving problems they have with other children. Even more troubling, this issue appears to have long-term effects that can stay with children into their teens and beyond. Through other research, Dr. Jonathon Plucker from Indiana University has concluded that, "Finding thing to do when bored is the way kids learn to be on their own, find out what interests them and what isn't boring. That's the problem we see with college students. The ones who have a hard time adjusting are those whose parents never transitioned into giving them more responsibility." Effects can also be seen in children who were not encouraged creatively and were not allowed to pursue their own independence.

These trends are pointing to a larger problem than children being bored or the inability to solve a classroom work problem. The larger issue here is a deficiency in the skills necessary to form mental images, think creatively, solve problems, visualize outcomes, and develop self-discipline.

Helping to guide your children to work through their boredom is essential. In the meantime, as they are learning how to be less bored and come in whining and complaining, you can be prepared and offer them some activities that are safe, fun and productive!

Nancy Nelson, Agent  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Family Life

### Keep Hydrated and Keep Those Water Bottles Clean

As the weather heats up, so does our need to stay hydrated. Experts suggest drinking at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day, and more if you're exercising. One of the least expensive, easiest and most environmentally responsible ways to get all that water is by using a refillable water bottle.

Reusable water bottles now come in both metal and safe plastic, not to mention a variety of shapes, sizes and designs. There are removable tops, sippy tops, straws and spritzers, but the one thing all water bottles have in common is that you need to keep them clean. Bacteria can build up in water bottles if they are left full, especially if you are using them for beverages other than water. For best results, use bottles for water only, especially if you will be traveling. Some beverages such as milk can spoil, and the high sugar content in juice and soda can draw bugs and other pesky critters to congregate on, in or around your drink.

Check the bottle label for cleaning recommendations. Some are dishwasher safe (but maybe only in the top rack). If your bottle needs to be washed by hand, follow these simple steps below to ensure that you have on-the-go safe drinking water all summer long.

Hand-wash all parts of the water bottle in warm water and dish detergent before using for the first time. Some factory residue could be left on a new bottle, even though it looks clean. Bottles may have also been sitting in warehouses, factories or stores for months, where they could have gotten dirty or been touched by dozens of people before you purchase them.

After each use, completely dismantle the water bottle and clean all parts thoroughly using warm water and dish detergent. If the bottle has a straw or spritzer, be sure to wash all those components, and then rinse thoroughly with clean water. Air-dry or use a clean towel.

So clean, refill and reuse those water bottles to stay hydrated and healthy all season long!