

GrassCycling in Kerry



Grass cutting in Killorglin, Co. Kerry in September 2010

The costs and benefits of GrassCycling in community areas

GrassCycling is the natural recycling of grass by leaving grass clippings on the lawn when mowing.

Once on the ground, the clippings, which contain 80-85% water, decompose quickly returning valuable nutrients like nitrogen back into the soil.

While GrassCycling is simple, easy and works very well in our climate, it must be remembered that it needs a systematic approach to ensure it works properly and that excess grass is not left on the cut area – this being the most common complaint about GrassCycling.

However, this is only an issue if the lawn management system, which can include thatching, aerating, cutting, watering and fertilising, is not observed.

For GrassCycling to work effectively there are 3 key aspects:

- 1. Reduce thatch or matting**
- 2. Cut less grass but cut more regularly**
- 3. Use the proper mulching mower**



As part of the national STOP Food Waste programme, which is run through the EPA National Waste Prevention Programme, an investigation was conducted into the use of GrassCycling as a waste prevention technique. The purpose of the study was to determine, from a cost benefit perspective, the viability of grasscycling in the management of lawn areas for residential communities and local authority green areas.

Killorglin in Co. Kerry was chosen for this pilot investigation. In St James Garden in Killorglin, the grass is usually cut using a regular mower and the grass cuttings are removed from the site when finished.

Periodically the grass in St James is cut by a community mulching mower but this mower services other towns on the Iveragh peninsula (mainly Cahirsiveen and Kenmare) and it is kept in those areas. Due to the infrequent service by this mower to Killorglin, a proper GrassCycling system cannot be put in place. A similar situation occurs in the Mountain View estate as to that in St. James Garden.

During this study only St. James Garden was examined, though the areas of grass cut are similar in both. The area cut in Mountain View is about 4,000 m² and in St James Garden it is about 5,000m².

What did we find?



It is estimated that the communal area in St James has its grass cut about 12 times each year: twice a month from May to August and once a month in September, October, March and April.

The weight of grass cut in mid September 2010 was **1.8 tonnes**. This was estimated to be lighter than average with thicker, and heavier, growths occurring during the warmer summer months. An average of 2 tonnes per cutting has been taken.

Based on the current gate fee for green waste at the North Kerry Landfill site of €150/tonne (incl VAT), the potential cost of disposal ONLY, is €3,600 (€300 x 12). At the moment, the grass is usually removed locally at a cost of €80 per load. Based on this costing, the annual cost of grass removal is €960 (€80 x 12).

Taking these values and an average mulching mower cost of €3,000 the payback period ranges between **6 and 21 months**.



	<i>St. James Garden</i>	<i>Mountain View</i>	<i>Total Cost</i>	<i>Payback Period</i>
Cost (based on gate fee)	€3,600	€2,720	€6,320	6 months
Cost (based on local removal)	€960	€768	€1,728	21 months

St James Garden - 5,000 m²;

Mountain View 4,000 m²



The mowing process - cut, load and then remove and dispose. There are more than just the costs of a mower associated with this!

The bottom line, is it worth it?

In another local estate, where the residents have a mulching mower, GrassCycling is working a treat. So, is it worth it?? Considering its proven effectiveness and the payback time involved, then from an investment point of view, absolutely! However, it is important to remember that the costs involved here do not take into

consideration those associated with transportation of waste, the maintenance and storage of the mower or people's time. So, based on the initial calculations and considering the other external costs involved, investment in a mulching mower for these two estates (not considering other lawns areas in the locality) is both economically and environmentally a very good long-term investment.