

## A Case Study

# GRASSCYCLING



**Grasscycling...**

## *Del Conte's Landscaping*

Del Conte's Landscaping is based in Fremont, California and provides landscaping installation and maintenance, recycling and irrigation services to many Bay Area clients. A staff of 110 year-round and 135 seasonal employees pride themselves on providing exceptional customer service that leads to company growth and profitability.

Owner Tom Del Conte started the company in 1972 as a one-man operation. His business continues to grow and thrive as Tom continues to seek and implement innovative methods for meeting and surpassing the needs of his customers, while growing his bottom line.

Grasscycling is a central practice that Del Conte's Landscaping employs in order to maintain beautiful and healthy landscapes while saving the company time and money. And grasscycling is a critical part of the management plan for the landscapes at ten homeowner associations that Del Conte's crews maintain at Harbor Bay Isle in Alameda.

***Means leaving the grass clippings on the lawn after mowing, so they decompose and release their nutrients into the soil.***

## *What does it take to make grasscycling work?*

Tom Del Conte feels that successful grasscycling depends on:

- Knowledge and commitment on the part of the company's management.
- Timing mowing with irrigation schedules and good water management.
- Seasonal timing.
- Training your staff.
- Clients that are interested in long-term health of their landscapes.

**THE BOTTOM LINE: 30-55% REDUCTION IN TURF MANAGEMENT COSTS**

## ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF GRASSCYCLING

### *Saving thousands of dollars in labor costs each month*

- After starting grasscycling at Contempo in Union City, another of Del Conte's clients, labor for mowing went from 80 staff hours per week – when staff had to catch and haul off clippings – to 48 staff hours per week.
- This 40% savings in labor at the Contempo site means a reduction in cost of approximately \$1,385 per month.
- At Harbor Bay Island in Alameda, a much larger client encompassing 10 planned communities, grasscycling has been employed from the start. Extrapolating the savings experienced at Contempo translates to more than \$50,000 per year in lower labor costs.

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***“Hauling off clippings means hauling off moisture and nutrients. The two things you will be putting back into the system are moisture and nutrients through irrigation and fertilization.”*** — Tom Del Conte, president, Del Conte's Landscaping

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### *Cutting back on disposal costs*

- Del Conte's Landscaping recycles approximately 175 cubic yards of clippings each year, by leaving them on the 10 acres of turf they maintain at Harbor Bay.
- At "clean green" rates, that translates into a savings of approximately \$2,500 per year in disposal fees.

### *Reducing the likelihood of injury*

- By leaving them on the lawn, employees are not lifting almost 33 tons of grass clippings each year.

### *Benefits to the Client*

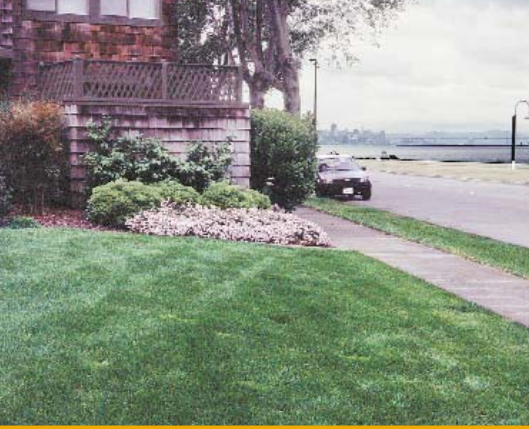
#### *Lower Water Use*

- The porous soils at Harbor Bay were previously being watered every day. Del Conte's Landscaping has cut the water requirements to 3 times per week while keeping the lawns looking green and lush.

#### *Healthy Soil and Turf*

- Grasscycling returns nutrients to the soil, releasing them slowly and when the plants need them.





## From the Client...

***“We are always open to new practices, especially environmentally friendly ones. We think that reducing green waste by leaving grass clippings on the lawns is also very beneficial to our unique soil conditions.”***

— Teri Gard, CCAM, Association Manager, Community of Harbor Bay Owners Association

## Project Description

The first year of the grasscycling program, Del Conte’s found the turf roots were not well established. They were not able to delay irrigation long enough to dry the turf out and create good mulching conditions - without stressing the lawn. By the second year Del Conte’s staff had fine tuned the watering system to optimize dryness for mulching. The irrigation events are now coordinated so the last watering is 2 days before mowing. They also have stretched the irrigation cycle so they only water 2 or 3 times per week. Some of the sites thrive on an irrigation program of 2 days per week for all but 2 months of the year.

Seasonal timing is also important to the success of Del Conte’s grasscycling program. His crews begin catching the grass clippings on October 15th. They return to grasscycling on April 1st.

Del Conte’s has invested in grasscycling equipment but still feels the hardware costs are minimal. Mowers that are designed for mulching or have baffles do the best job. But his equipment also includes non-mulching mowers that are adapted to grasscycling with discharge shoot plugs and/or special blades. He recommends changing out the whole fleet within one week when grasscycling begins in April or when it

stops in October for the rainy season. He stresses the importance of switching an entire crew’s equipment in one day.

Tom feels that providing the crews with good training is essential so they can employ the appropriate remedy to special situations. A supervisor works with each crew to see what method delivers the best results. For example, in most



cases, spot use of a blower will eliminate any clumps of clippings left on the turf. In other cases, a second pass with the mower will do the best job. Del Conte’s staff is trained to recognize which tactic works best and to only do the second mowing on the clumps...they don’t need to go over the entire area.

Finally, Tom & his staff talk to their clients about grasscycling, give them literature and explain that it is supported by

the Professional Lawn Care Association of American and encouraged by Alameda County Waste Management Authority. Their maintenance contracts do not specifically include grasscycling, but more importantly, they do not contain a clause that requires that all clippings be caught and hauled to the landfill. Clients that are keen on the long-term health of their lawns as well as a beautiful lush look give them the go ahead to grasscycle.

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***“I can’t emphasize enough the importance of irrigation in lawn health and the success of a grasscycling program. To do grasscycling right requires a commitment to an integrated management system.”*** — Tom Del Conte, Del Conte’s Landscaping

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## About the Agency

The Alameda County Waste Management Authority & the Alameda County Source Reduction and Recycling Board is an integrated public agency whose mission is to provide the most environmentally sound waste management program for the people of Alameda County. The Authority and the Recycling Board produced this case study to aid landscapers in the reuse and reduction of plant debris.

## For More Information Ask About our FREE resources:

- A Landscaper's Guide to Grasscycling
- Spanish translation: "Una Guía para Reciclar Pasto para los Jardineros"
- Grasscycling brochure to give to your clients

## Grasscycling is Endorsed by:

- Northern California Turf & Landscape Council
- California Landscape Contractors Association
- Professional Lawn Care Association of America

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Call our composting hotline: 510-444-SOIL  
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