



by Carol Seminara, HCMG

## When the Rains Come, Part 2

Amazing how the landscape looks clean and fresh after a bath. How quickly a green tint becomes visible across the fields and rain lilies (*Zephyranthes drummondii*) begin popping up everywhere. After an extended dry spell one might even hear people rejoicing that they will have to mow their lawns.

Rain Lilies (*Zephyranthes drummondii*), also called Field Lilies or Prairie Lilies, bloom two or three days after a heavy rain fall. A member of the Amaryllis family, Rain Lilies are classified as a native perennial geophyte (bulb) plant. Their fragrant blossoms open at night and only last a day or two. Other varieties of rain lilies can have pink or yellow flowers.



A couple of quick notes regarding mowing turf grass during a drought and when it's wet. First, to help your lawn survive the stress of a drought and/or oppressive summer heat, remember to raise your mower blade to the maximum height

recommended for your particular turf: 2-inches for Bermudagrass, 4-inches for St. Augustine grass, and for buffalo grass, 6-inches. This will help protect your turfgrass root systems. Remember that grasses with deeper, stronger roots can compete successfully with weeds for water and nutrients. Too, the added height of the grass can prevent the establishment of weeds by providing shading to weed seedlings.

Second, although the popular wisdom is to never mow wet grass\*, the fact is you can but with some common sense preparations and precautions. Despite the facts that the grass is slippery and the clippings cling to everything, it is better to mow healthy wet grass than to allow it to grow too tall. Generally, you do not want to cut off more than one-third of the grass leaf blade in a single mowing. You need to leave enough leaf surface for photosynthesis. Removing more than a third of the grass blade reduces your lawn's ability to feed itself and can lead to reduced vigor and fewer roots.

If the ground is soggy and you are sinking as you walk, don't mow. Also, if you are using an electric mower with an extension cord, don't mow when the grass is wet. You already knew this, didn't you? If your lawn has a fungal disease, you shouldn't mow it wet. Your mower blade should be sharp. Always. Whether the grass is wet or not. Your goal is to cut, not shred, the tops of the grass leaf blades.

Some folks lightly coat their mower blades, top and bottom, with a thin coat of vegetable oil applied with a paper towel. However, there is viable concern that oil, even a little vegetable oil, has no place in your lawn. Spraying the mower blades with silicon might be one way to help keep clippings from clinging to the blades. Nonetheless, it is always a good idea to make certain your mower blades are clean and free of any dirt or old grass clippings before you begin. As with other periods of stress, the mower blades should be set high.

Some advise running the mower at a slower speed to reduce strain on the machine; others suggest running the mower at a faster speed to better fling off the wet clippings. I'm inclined to run my mower at a slower rate. I've not noticed a marked difference in the amount of clipping build-up either way and at a slower speed I feel more in control. Too, I'm not in a race to finish the lawn now that the temperature is no longer 100+ degrees.

Push the mower slowly and don't try to cut too much grass at one time. If you do end up with a clump of grass that clogs your mower, turn it off and allow the blades to completely stop before attempting to clear the clog. Never, ever, never try to clean a mower that is still turning. Never.

The Turfgrass Program folks at Purdue University in Indiana, where it rains a lot and people still mow their lawns, recommend removing the mulching attachment from your mower and allowing the clippings to discharge out the side. Mow so the clippings fall onto the already mown areas, then later in the day, mow again. This double-mow should break up any clipping clumps lying around and any still-tall grass you may have missed on your first pass. If the clumps are too large or unsightly, rake them up for your compost pile.

\*A vocal opponent of cutting wet grass is Dr. Jerry Parsons. On his Plant Answers website [PlantAnswers.com](http://PlantAnswers.com) he says "DO NOT, hear me, DO NOT MOW GRASS WHEN IT IS WET!" His point is that you will stain your clothes (from the chlorophyll), clog your mower and spread Brown Patch Fungus Disease and Take-All Fungus Disease in your lawn. He also says to avoid spreading the fungus, do not walk through infected areas or do not allow pets to run through areas infected with Texas-Brown patch.