

NEWS RELEASE  
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## MULCH – THE STAFF OF LIFE

### BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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At some point, a garden advisor probably should take his own advice. A clear example is the recommended April 10 “average last frost” date for the 2,000-foot elevation. Since planting in mid-March last year turned out fine, my garden this year, or more properly, my first garden did not quite make our late frosts. My 2003 Garden #2 seems to be doing better, having been planted after my own “April 10” recommended date.

Another very good idea expressed in this column is to use plenty of mulch. Even in the lawn, there are many benefits. Also, grass clippings, being over 90% water, are not the cause of thatch accumulation. To mulch lawn clippings, rather than replacing my old, but reliable standard lawn mower, a simple adaptation resulted in a “mulching mower.” In my case, this involved removing the grass catcher and attaching a piece of plywood over the grass exit hole. This homemade mulching mower worked fairly well until recently. The record April rains produced a backyard lawn that seemed to grow two inches a day. My weekly mowing schedule finally resulted in just too many clippings at one time.

#### Internet to the Rescue!

One of the benefits of the Internet is the ability to easily search for needed items. A quick check of “mulching blades” brought up several options, including a \$12 mulching blade replacement for my 15-year-old standard lawn mower. Arriving Friday, my Saturday chore was to try my latest great idea.

The difference between a standard mowing blade and a special mulching one was dramatic. It has several different edges and bends, but easily fit the mower. Rather than being designed to throw the clippings out into the grass catcher, this blade makes the clippings go through several cuts first. Then, the finely chopped grass leaves fall down, resulting in a useful lawn mulch.

To be safe in converting a standard, bag mower into a mulching mower, always check with the manufacturer and use only recommended conversion kits. These include special cutting blades and other modifications to the mower body.

For more information, call the UCCE office in Mariposa County at (209) 966-2417, for a free leaflet.

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