

Proper Lawn Watering Prevents Problems and Saves Water

So many aspects of successful lawn care center around correct watering practices. Preventing lawns from drying out, discouraging weed growth, slowing thatch build-up and preventing disease problems are all functions of correct watering.

There are three components of successful lawn watering; how long to water, how often to water, and what time of day to water.

How long to water is easily determined, and once set need not be changed. It's all a matter of wetting the soil to the proper depth. Bermuda grass roots typically grow down about 6 inches into the soil. Watering deeper than six inches is unnecessary and wasteful. To wet the soil to a depth of 6 inches requires the application of one-half inch of irrigation water.

To determine when one-half inch has been applied it's necessary to set out a number of cans to catch the water. These Acatch cans[®] may be any straight sided cans such as; tuna, bean, or soup cans. They should be placed randomly about the lawn. For a typical sized lawn (about 1,000 square feet) a minimum of 7 catch cans should be used. This will provide a representative sample of the amount of water being applied. Turn on the sprinklers and let them run for a period of time, say 20 minutes. Then measure the water in each can; add up the amounts and divide the total by the number of cans. This will give you the average amount of water being applied. If for instance, after 20 minutes your average application amount was one quarter inch, then the watering time must be doubled, to 40 minutes, in order to apply twice the amount of water: the recommended one-half inch.

Applying too little water will wet only the top layer of soil. As a result, grass roots will be shallow and unable to withstand our summer heat and sun. Weed seeds in turn, will sprout and fill in the areas where thirsty grass dies. So when watering, always apply the recommended

oneself inch.

The best way to determine how often to water your lawn is by a visual check. Looking for the early stages of wilt will clue you in on when to water. Grass that is stressed for moisture will appear off colored. Instead of being a bright, shiny green, patches or sections will appear dull and gray-green in color. This drying grass will lose its springiness. When walked upon, footprints will remain for a period of time. It's time to water when these moisture stressed patches begin to appear. Counting back the number of days to the last watering will give you an idea how to set the irrigation time clock. If after three days from the last watering the grass begins showing signs of wilt, then water every three days. Periodically check for wilt and adjust the intervals between watering as needed. When the summer monsoon season arrives, be sure to skip watering cycles when rainfall occurs. This will help conserve water.

Another way to conserve water is to irrigate your lawn in the early morning hours. The ideal time to water is between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning. In the cool of the early morning less water is lost to evaporation. Conditions are generally calm so irrigation water goes where it is directed rather than being blown away with strong winds that are common later in the day. Evening watering of lawns is not recommended because of the possibility of disease infection. Grass which stays wet for more than 6 hours at a time is subject to fungal diseases. During the monsoon season evening rains and higher humidities, combined with evening watering can keep the grass wet for too long.

Finally, to keep your lawn in tip-top shape, never over-water either by amount applied or frequency of application. Water-logged lawns die over time from root rots, excessive accumulation of thatch and competition from weeds.