



Turf Tips

Lawn Watering

Most healthy lawns, if mown correctly and in the hands of a good comprehensive lawn health care program can withstand periods of drought and high heat, able to recover once the weather improves. The need for watering depends upon the use of the lawn (light to heavy), turf types present (drought tolerant to not), soil quality (sandy to clay), and mowing height (too short to 3"). See Chippers' Turf Tips on Mowing.

Watering Needs

As a general rule, lawns need an inch of water per week for optimum growth, health and performance. Since the leaf blade of the grass plant is mostly water, as the lawn grows it requires water as a basic ingredient for health. In the summer months, growth typically slows due to a lack of water and higher air temperatures. In the absence of rainfall, watering will be necessary if you are growing new grass or want to keep the lawn green throughout the summer.

Three Stages of Drought Stress

When suffering from a lack of water, a lawn goes through three stages. Stage 1 is initial stress that can be seen as a pale to dull green color, even purple in tint. These 'hot spots' often show up in the most exposed sunny areas of your lawn, on a slope, an area of high traffic, or over buried objects like ledge, a stump or a septic tank cover. In Stage 2, the grass begins to turn a light tan, wilt, and when walked on the grass blades fail to bounce upright, instead staying flat. At Stage 3, a lawn is dormant and has turned tan to brown, even straw-colored. This third level of drought stress can affect small patches to an entire lawn.

Watering Frequency & Amount

In the absence of rain, watering in Stages 1 and 2 can restore health and color often within a week or so if done correctly. Watering time varies but a general rule of thumb is infrequent (every other day) with a deep soaking (30 minutes to 1 hour). These guidelines are more beneficial than frequent (daily) shallow irrigation (20 minutes or less).

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Of course any water helps, but light, frequent watering promotes shallow roots. This can weaken your lawn over time, creating a dependence on watering. The infrequent and deeper watering we recommend helps saturate the soil, creating a reserve for moisture and a healthier, deeper, more aggressive root system.

A lawn that has reached complete dormancy in Stage 3 requires 2-4 weeks of consistent rain and/or irrigation to restart plant growth. A brown lawn is a magnet for heat-loving insects like chinch bugs and grubs, so be sure to have your brown lawn inspected. If weeks of dry, hot weather don't stretch into months, an otherwise healthy lawn with completely dormant sections should recover with rain and cooler fall temperatures.

Time of Day

Avoid watering in the late afternoon or overnight during the summer as this predisposes and even encourages a variety of potentially very damaging diseases such as brown patch, pythium and summer patch. As a general rule, watering should be done in the early-to-late morning to help minimize the occurrence of summer turf diseases.

Even with proper mowing practices and protection from damaging insects, most lawns will suffer minor to severe browning at some point in the summer. Timely, proper irrigation of 'hot spots' can help reduce drought-induced turf stress and disease, allowing you to enjoy your lawn all season long.

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