



Turf Tips

Lawn Watering

*Most healthy lawns, if mown correctly and in a comprehensive and quality lawn 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 (drought tolerant to not), soil quality (sandy to clay), and mowing height (too short to 3"). See our **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, it is required as a basic ingredient for health. In the summer, growth typically slows due to a lack of water and higher air temperatures. When temperatures exceed the mid-80's, our New England cool-season turf varieties will shut down and quickly turn from a tan to white, depending upon exposure, turf type, and location. With high temperature and the absence of rainfall, watering will be necessary if you want to keep your lawn green throughout the summer.

Three Stages of Drought & Heat Stress

When suffering from a lack of water or temperatures above 85°, 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. 'Hot spots' often show up in the most exposed sunny areas of your lawn, on a slope, in high traffic areas, in sandy soil or over buried objects such as a ledge or a septic tank cover. In Stage 2, the grass begins to turn a light tan to brown, wilt and when walked on the grass blades stay flat, failing to rebound. At Stage 3, a lawn is dormant and has turned white, tan or brown, even straw-colored. This third level of drought stress can affect small patches to an entire lawn, even if irrigated when temperatures remain high for several days.

Watering Frequency & Amount

In the absence of rain, watering in Stages 1 and 2 can restore health and color often within a few weeks if done correctly. The earlier the stress is addressed, the quicker the recovery. 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 (daily) shallow irrigation of 20 minutes or less. Of course, in high heat or an extended drought (several weeks to a month) any water helps, but light, frequent watering generally promotes shallow roots.

This can weaken your lawn over time, creating a dependence on watering and making your grass more susceptible to drought/heat stress. The recommended less frequent and deeper watering helps saturate the soil, creating a reserve for moisture and a healthier, more aggressive root system.

A lawn that has reached complete dormancy in Stage 3 may require 3-5 weeks of consistent rain/irrigation in combination with cooler air temperatures to restart 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 in complete dormancy 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.

Organic Matter

The more organic matter (OM) you have in your soil, the greater the capacity for your lawn to maintain a water reserve. Improving OM content in your soil can be achieved by mulching your clippings and selecting soil improvement services such as compost tea, seaweed, soil restoration and granular fertilizers.

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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