

Lawn Care

By
Scott Hininger
University of Wyoming Extension
Sheridan County
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Many factors influence lawn water requirements, and no two lawns are exactly alike. A healthy, high-quality bluegrass lawn may need up to 2.25 inches of water per week under hot, dry, windy summer conditions; bluegrass only uses 1.5 inches of water per week. It may require much less when the weather is cool or cloudy. Shady lawns and areas protected from the wind require less water over the growing season than more exposed turf. However, the roots of mature trees and shrubs also need water. You may have to water more in mature landscapes where the roots of many plants compete for water. Healthy turf encouraged by proper mowing, fertilizing and cultivation, uses water more efficiently.

Each time you water the lawn, apply enough water to moisten as much of the root zone as possible. Watering deep and less frequently encourages healthier deeper roots and less disease problems. If the soil is mainly clay, apply 1 to 1.5 inches of water to moisten the root zone to a 6-inch depth. A sandy soil can be moistened to 6 inches by as little as .5 inches. It is important to know not only how deep the turf roots grow, but also how deep your irrigation water penetrates. The top one to two inches of soil should dry out before watering again.

Based on the above, grass that grows on sandy soil must be watered more often than the same grass growing on clay or loam soils. Even after a thorough watering, sandy soils hold little plant-available moisture. They require more frequent irrigation with smaller amounts of water. Conversely, turf growing on a loamy-clay soil can be irrigated less frequently, with larger quantities of water. Watering less often means more efficient water use because of less loss to evaporation. It can also reduce the number of weeds that appear in the lawn.

A hardened or toughened lawn, attained through less frequent, deep irrigation, often withstands minor drought and generally has fewer disease problems. It is important, however, that the turf not be allowed to become overly drought-stressed between watering's. The most efficient time of day to water is late evening and early morning. It generally is less windy, cooler and more humid at this time, resulting in less evaporation and more efficient use of water. Water pressure is generally better and this results in optimal distribution patterns. Watering once per week this time of year and two to three times per week in July and August is usually adequate.

The two most important facets of mowing are mowing height and frequency. The minimum height for any lawn is 2 inches. The preferred mowing height is 2.5 to 3 inches. Mowing to less than 2 inches can result in decreased drought and heat tolerance and higher incidence of insects, diseases and weeds, because the root system is shorter, taller grass has

deeper roots. Mow the turf often enough so no more than 1/3 of the grass height is removed at any single mowing. If your mowing height is 2 inches, mow the grass when it is 3 inches tall. You may have to mow a bluegrass or fescue lawn every three to four days during the spring when it is actively growing but only once every seven to 10 days when growth is slowed by heat, drought or cold.

Let grass clippings to fall back onto the lawn, unless they are used for composting or mulching elsewhere in the landscape. Grass clippings decompose quickly and provide a source of recycled nutrients and organic matter for the lawn. Mulching mowers can do this easily. Grass clippings do not contribute to thatch accumulation. If herbicides are applied to the lawn, do not use clippings in the vegetable or flower Gardens.

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