

CHORES

Keep grass watered, not waterlogged

By RICK ROSEN
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Do you know how much water your lawn needs?

Most people don't. If you turn on your sprinklers two or more times a week, you might be overwatering.

Watering too much isn't just wasteful. Deep and infrequent watering is better for the health of your grass. Such a schedule helps grow deep roots, which makes grass less susceptible to freeze damage and disease. A general rule is to give your lawn one inch of water per week. A more precise rule is to water enough so that the soil is moist to a depth of 6 inches.

How do you determine how long to run the irrigation system? The Texas A&M turfgrass program recommends these steps:

- Set out five or six open-top cans, such as old tuna or cat-food cans, randomly on the lawn. You need at least five because sprinkler heads don't spray uniformly; some areas of your lawn get more water than others.

- Run the sprinkler or sprinkler system for 30 minutes.

- Measure the depth of water in each can.

- Add the water depth in each can and divide by the number of cans. This gives the average depth of water. For example, three of the five cans measure 0.5 inches of water, one measures 0.6 inches and the last 0.4 inches. Add up the five (2.5 inches), divide by five (you used five cans), and you get 0.5 inches of water in 30 minutes.

- Once you know the depth of the wet soil and how long your sprinkler system ran, just do the math to figure out how long the system needs to run to put out an inch of water. (In our example, the sprinklers put out a half-inch of water in 30 minutes, so an inch of water would be an hour.)

Clay soil such as ours, which doesn't drain well, presents special problems. If water is running off your lawn after 20 minutes or so, split the time you water. Water, let the soil dry for 30 minutes or an hour, then resume watering until you reach the ideal time.

After the initial 20 minutes of watering a lawn planted in native clay, push a garden spade into the ground.

"It will push through the wet soil easily, but will become difficult when it reaches dry soil," the turfgrass site says. Measure the depth of the wet soil. If, for example, the



FILE/Staff photo

Watering improperly is harmful to your lawn's health. Applying water infrequently but deeply is ideal.

depth is 2 inches, you triple the watering time to wet the soil to the desired 6 inches deep.

You can follow the general rule to give your lawn one inch of water per week, or you can go one better: Irrigate only when the grass needs it.

How do you know when your lawn needs watering? Symptoms of grass that needs watering, according to the Aggie turf experts, "include grass leaves turning a dull, bluish color, leaf blades rolling or folding and footprints persisting for an extended period of time after walking across the lawn."

MORE WATERING TIPS

- While established lawns need deep and infrequent watering, newly planted turf needs light and frequent watering. Reduce the frequency and increase the amount of water when the new plantings take root.

- Add in rainfall when calculating how much water the turf needs that week.

- Water in the morning to minimize evaporation.

- Trees suck up moisture, so grass near trees will need more water than other areas.

- Make sure sprinkler heads are in good condition and that they water the lawn, not the sidewalk.

DigitalEXTRA

Link: Log on to read more about the Texas A&M turfgrass program's irrigation steps.
dallasnews.com/home

They're using chemicals next door

My next-door neighbor has hired a landscape company that uses chemical products. They'll be using herbicides and insecticides and who knows what else.

We share a privacy fence with this man and have a pomegranate bush and a raised-bed vegetable garden 5 feet from his fence. How much impact will the chemicals have on our pomegranates and vegetables?
C.G., Dallas

ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT
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of last year. Recently, I noticed damage to the lower trunk of the tree, and I'm not sure what to do. I did find the cause: cats using the tree as a scratching post. I thought about placing chicken wire around the base of the tree to keep the cats away. I'm not sure whether to let the trunk heal on its own or try a remedy of some sort.

C.C., Dallas

Chicken wire arranged very loosely around the trunk would be fine as long as you promise to check it frequently to make sure it isn't touching or cutting into the tree.

Apply my Tree Trunk Goop to the wound. This is a mixture of equal amounts of compost, soft rock phosphate and natural diatomaceous earth. Add water until the mixture becomes pastelike, and then slather it on the damaged area. Reapply after rain or sprinklers wash it off.

I was disappointed to learn that you don't recommend compost containers. We've had one for two or three years, and we prefer having the compost contained since we have small grandchildren who visit. Until this spring, we were

pleased with the process and results. We have limited gardening time, and the quantity the container produces, while small, has helped our azaleas and other plants. Now, however, the smell is awful, and we have thousands of fruit flies buzzing around every time we add something to the container. Is it because the weather isn't hot enough to "cook" the compost sufficiently? I add dry molasses every so often to encourage the composting process and have even tried a bucket of orange oil solution to discourage flies, but to no avail.
D.F., Dallas

It's not that I don't recommend compost containers, it's just that they have limited capacity. Free-standing piles can produce more compost in the same length of time if managed properly.

Don't add much orange oil. More than a light spray will kill beneficial microbes.

You need to add dry brown material of some kind to your compost to counter the wet green material. Shredded paper also may help.

Outdoor temperature has no effect on the composting process.

RESOURCES

ONLINE: www.dirtdoctor.com for free organic-program handouts

RADIO: KSKY-AM (660), Saturday 11 a.m.-noon and Sunday 8-11 a.m. www.ksky.com

MAIL: P.O. Box 140650, Dallas, TX 75214

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