

Watering Tips

Proper watering techniques are a critical aspect of lawn watering, equal in importance to the issues of when to water and how much to water. Here are several key factors to proper technique:

Avoid hand sprinkling because it cannot provide the necessary uniformity. Most people do not have the patience, time or "eye" to adequately measure what is being applied across any large areas of lawn. The only possible exception to this guideline would be the need to sprinkle the surface of the grass to cool it, or to provide additional water near buildings or other heat-reflecting surfaces.

Understand the differences between sprinkler designs because each type has its advantages and disadvantages. Its proper use will be determined by the type of sprinkler you select.

In-Ground systems require professional design and installation and they require routine adjustments and regular maintenance to be most effective and efficient. The greatest mistake made with most in-ground systems is the "set it and forget it" philosophy that fails to account for the changing seasonal weather requirements to maximize turf growth or even allowing the system to operate during or following a multi-inch rain storm. Another frequent problem is when heads get out of alignment and apply water to the sidewalk, street or house-siding, rather than to the lawn.

Hose-End Sprinklers range in complexity, cost and durability, but are highly portable and can provide uniform and consistent coverage, when properly placed on the yard and adequately maintained.

Sprinklers that do not throw the water high into the air are usually more efficient, as are larger drop generators because prevailing winds are less disruptive of distribution patterns, the potential for evaporation loss is reduced and trees, shrubs and other plants do not block the pattern (or are very noticeable if they do).

Several times during the growing/watering season, routine maintenance is important to check for blocked outlets, leaking or missing gaskets, or mis-aligned sprinkler heads, regardless of the sprinkler design.

Verifying water uniformity can be accomplished with a very simple and inexpensive method that uses only 4 to 6 flat-bottomed, straight sided cans (tuna fish, cat food, etc), a ruler and a watch. Follow these steps:

Step #1: arrange the cans at random distances away from the sprinkler, but all within the area you assume is being covered.

Step #2: run the sprinkler for a specific amount of time, say a half-hour OR run the water until a specific amount of water is in at least one can, say 0.5in (1.3cm)

Step #3: measure the amount of water in each can, check for uniformity. Some variation is expected, but a difference of 25-30% or more between any two cans must be addressed by replacing or adjusting the sprinkler or relocating the system.

This measuring method should be used across an entire lawn that has an in-ground irrigation system to assure maximum coverage and uniformity.

Watering difficult areas such as slopes and under trees requires some special attention to achieve maximum benefit and a beautiful lawn.

For Slopes, see (Watering Tip #3)

For Areas Under and Near Trees, you need to know the water requirements for the specific trees, as well as for the grass. Despite having deep "anchor" roots, trees take up moisture and nutrients from the top of six inches of soil..the same area as the grass. Trees and turf will compete for water. Watering sufficiently for the grass may over-water some varieties of trees and under-water others. A common solution is to not plant grass under the drip-line of trees, but rather use that area for perennial ground covers, flower beds or mulch beds.

How much water is needed and applied

The amount of water your lawn requires and receives will determine its overall health, beauty and ability to withstand use and drought. Keep in mind that too much water can ruin a lawn just as fast as too little water.

One inch (2.5 cm) a week is a watering "rule of thumb" suggested for most lawns; however, this will vary between different turf species and even among cultivars without a specie. There will also be varying water requirements for seasonal changes and still more differences brought about because of different soil types.

Look at your lawn to determine its water needs. Grass in need of water will have a grey-blue cast, rather than a blue-green or a green color. Also, foot prints will still appear after a half-hour or more on a lawn in need of water, while on a well watered lawn, foot prints will completely disappear within a few minutes. Inspecting your lawn frequently will help you detect water requirements and to avoid over- or under-watering.

Verify watering quantities with the same measuring can method described above, except you will want to note the time it takes for the cans to collect a specific amount of water. For example, if 0.25 in. (0.6cm) collects in 30 minutes, you can easily calculate that it will take one hour to apply 0.5in (1.3cm) of water and two hours to apply 1 in. (2.5 cm) of water.

Water timers can help provide the consistency and even be programmed or set to turn on and off when no one is awake or at home. Some timers measure just the amount of time water is flowing through the device, while others measure the number of gallons of water flowing through it. Read the directions with the timer to determine how yours operates.