

LAWN WATERING

Keeping the lawn emerald-green, barefoot-soft and dandelion-free requires a significant amount of attention, and can have serious impacts on lakes, streams and groundwater. Like a summer storm, runoff from a sprinkler can wash soil, lawn chemicals, pet waste and other pollutants into storm sewers – a network of underground pipes that empty directly into the river. Water from a sprinkler flowing down one driveway might not seem like a big problem. But careless watering on hundreds of lawns can:

- Wash pollutants into the river
- Deplete water supplies.
- Actually damage the lawns it's supposed to help.

The Fine Art of Lawn Watering

Healthy lawn requires about one inch of water per week.

As a general rule, apply the water all at once rather than in several light waterings. Before you water, do some arithmetic. If it just rained 1/4 inch, you probably only need to apply 3/4 inch with the sprinkler. Avoid watering during the middle of the day when evaporation rates are highest and the water you use will do the least good. Early morning watering will minimize evaporation and help newly seeded areas through the day's heat.

Consider the weather forecast.

If there is a good chance of rain soon after that 1/4-inch rainfall, do not water at all. If the rain doesn't come, you can make up the difference.

Know your lawn.

For example, sandy soils with little organic matter will require more water, heavy clay soils less. Sloping lawns are normally drier than level, low-lying ones. Lawns under large trees, especially during cool weather, may need little or no watering. Too much water can keep the soil too moist, which damages roots. Excessive watering can also wash away seeds, cause seeds to rot before they germinate, increase the chances of disease, or slow the growth of new grass.

Reduce the Needs for Watering

1. When selecting seed, consider bluegrass and fescue mixes, which tend to be more drought-tolerant than ryegrasses.
2. To promote deep rooting and lawns that tolerate dry conditions, mow grass no shorter than two inches.
3. Do not fertilize a dry lawn – high concentrations of nutrients tend to draw moisture out of grass. Control weeds to reduce competition for soil moisture. This may be done by hand, or with careful use of broadleaf herbicides.
4. Direct downspouts away from foundations and driveways to planting beds and lawns where the water can soak in. Besides more efficient use of water, there will be less runoff from your property.
5. Learn to live with temporary brownouts. A few weeks of dormancy will not hurt the roots of a healthy lawn.

Adapted from University of Wisconsin–Extension in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. (1999). *Lawn Watering - A Series of Water Quality Fact Sheets for Residential Areas*. [Brochure]. Author: Korb, G.