

Of late, I am reminded of the tune by the late Glen Fry, “The Heat is On.” Reflecting back, one might recall that April and May were extremely wet— rain, rain and still more rain. It was wonderful —then the spigot turned off!

Since early June, many communities in Central Nebraska have received unseasonable heat and little, if any, rain. Where I live, in Minden, Nebraska, the city recently declared a water crisis, and the community is currently in a Stage 2 Water Watch. Interestingly, the problem is not the availability of enough ground water. Rather, the well water used by the citizens of Minden must first pass through Minden’s water treatment plant before being consumed. With continuous high temperatures and minimal rain, homeowners were using more water than the water treatment could place in reserve. Thus, water rationing went into effect. Unfortunately, landscapes that were once lush green are now parched and showing stress. Furthermore, the hot, dry temperatures continue.

As we all know, water is essential to all forms of life, including turf grass. Water moves from the soil into the plants. Once inside a plant, it then moves out of the leaf into the air, thus cooling the plant, a process called evapotranspiration. The current hot air temperatures and strong winds have accelerated this movement causing many plants to wilt and desiccate. As a result, proper water management is extremely important to support healthy turf grass, especially during exceptionally hot weather

Knowledge of one’s lawn and proper use of irrigation equipment will help to keep a lawn healthy, save water and save money. Over-watering is expensive and can lead to unhealthy turf. However, overwatering is a widespread problem. The following describes a few recommended watering procedures to follow during prolonged hot temperatures.

First, for turf grass to remain healthy, the soil must be moist but not saturated. When watering during times of excessive heat, watering two days in a row may be needed to achieve consistent moist soil. The type of soil and level of soil compaction greatly affects the soils ability to absorb and hold moisture. Once the soil is moistened to a depth of four to six inches, wait to water again until turf grass shows signs of drought stress —a blue-grey color and foot prints that often

remain visible after walking on the turf. Bluegrass lawns should receive a minimum of one inch of water per week to remain healthy. Water early in the morning between 4:00 and 8:00 A.M. for efficiency and to minimize the loss of water through evaporation.

Other general techniques to reduce unnecessary watering and saving money exist. Consider mowing turf to a height of at least three inches. Turf grass that is maintained at greater heights has a deeper root system enabling the turf to access water more easily. Reduce traffic on drought-stressed turf. Foot traffic as well as lawn mower and other vehicular traffic can cause serious injury to drought- stressed turf. Lastly, avoid irrigating when rain is predicted, and shut off automatic irrigation after a rain.

The turf science department of the University of Nebraska in Lincoln has an excellent publication to help homeowners with their turf grass watering concerns. The document can be downloaded from the web by going to the website <http://turf.unl.edu> . The publication is called *Irrigating Home Lawns*. When at their website, search **Pub. Turf 2011**. If web access is not available, please stop by the Extension office and pick up a copy for free.

Yes, the heat is truly on and watering lawns remains crucial! Please do so wisely.