
Watering Lawns and Landscapes

There are two basic choices in water lawns and landscape plantings. Water regularly or don't water at all unless it is a question of survival. Watering sometimes will get you in the worst trouble. If you want to kill a "Cadillac lawn", fertilize regularly, mow twice a week, water twice a week, then go fishing in Canada for two weeks during the 100 degree heat spell in August. You can come home and replant the lawn in September and complain about the neighbor who never watered and has a nice green lawn. Shifting from drive to reverse at freeway speeds is not advised.

Fully watered lawns will use one inch of water per week in May, June and September, and 1.5 to 2.0 inches per week in July and August. Bluegrass lawns have an active root system about 18 inches to 2 feet deep. Our soils will store about 2 inches of water per foot of soil. This means that there is a two to three week between rain supply during May and a one to two week supply during the July and August heat. Mowing high will reduce water use rates.

The University of Nebraska recommends watering one to twice per week with each application being from 3/4 -inch to 1-inch of water applied. We would like to see some room left in the soil to take advantage of rains. Excessive water applications cost money, waste water, and can leach plant nutrients through the root zone into the groundwater.

Many times we find homeowners with lawn problems, who have never reset automatic watering systems from the seeding mode stage. This applies low volumes of water daily leading to shallow rooting, excessive wetting, and susceptibility to plant disease infections. A soil probe or soil moisture rod can be a valuable tool in helping to manage water for the lawn. Another aid is the crop water use information printed daily on page 2 of the Beatrice Daily Sun newspaper during the June to August period. The data is collected from the University of Nebraska Automated weather station located near Plymouth and provided to farmers and homeowners by Cooperative Extension in Gage County.

Trees in the lawn will generally get enough water from the lawn except during extended dry periods. If they need more a slow running hose moved around under the drip line applying at least 50 gallons of water per large tree is recommended. Be careful watering newly planted trees. The tendency is to over-water them for the first month and forget them after that. The drowning and drying syndrome has spelled the demise of many young transplants.

Landscape plantings need about the same amount of water as lawns. Don't forget three important differences in water landscape plantings. Many plantings are bermed up and rapid water applications can runoff and out into the yard quickly. Most plantings are well mulched, which will reduce water use in sunny and windy locations and can really slow water use in shady protected locations. Plantings on the south-side, along the sidewalk and/or in a brick planter can have higher water use and warmer soil temperatures, which can add stress and increase root disease and spider mite problems for some plants.

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