



June 6, 2008

## LAWN SPRINKLERS DO HAVE A SHUTOFF

Some homeowners this year have been over watering lawns and landscapes. Lawn sprinklers do have a shutoff valve. So why are people still running home lawn sprinklers wasting groundwater? You could hear the frustration of a lawn care professional in Crete last week talking about how soggy certain lawns have been the entire month of May, even to the point mowing is damaging the lawns. Farmers have not been able to plant all their crop this spring and I have reports of home lawn sprinklers still running? This is a waste of water, a precious resource, and can lead to unhealthy or dead plants.

UNL turf specialist and Backyard Farmer panelist Roch Gaussoin last week said home lawn irrigation to replenish soil moisture has not been required in Eastern Nebraska to date (as of June 6th). Furthermore, letting bluegrass root down to 8 to 12 inch depths in May is extremely beneficial when going into hot, dry periods. The grass is more disease tolerant and there is less soil compaction. In fact, excess irrigation with the rain will cause melting out disease fungus in lawns. A green lawn that gives you pride and joy will be more susceptible to fungal disease development from over watering. With all the water runoff this spring, Roch also says UNL has no NebGuide that educates homeowners how much water the driveway and street needs to stay alive.

Official rainfall records in Crete show that in a seven day period in May there were 3.3 inches of rain and the following week another 2.04 inches of rain. For the entire month, 7.48 was recorded almost three inches above normal precipitation. So with all this rain and cool weather NO IRRIGATION was required. Even when incorporating crabgrass preventer or fertilizer, all we had to do is listen to the rain forecast.

Evapotranspiration of a bluegrass lawn in the spring is only one inch of water per week and our soils will hold up to 2.2 inches of water per foot, with over half readily available to the plant. After a rain in May, a homeowner could have gone two weeks without irrigation. Fescues even have a deeper root system than bluegrass and could have gone even longer without irrigation during a dry event.

This week, 4-Her's from Gage and Saline Counties will be visiting Washington, D.C. and Colonial Williamsburg. Colonial Williamsburg used public humiliation to offenders by branding them or being put in the town square in stocks. Now that's an idea that would work, a new public law for water wasters. In all seriousness folks, we may have an increasing problem with a service oriented society today. Many people have enough resources they do not seem to care about wasting groundwater. I know many people in this county do care, however, water wasters could be found throughout eastern Nebraska this year. It's just not Crete, its everywhere including Lincoln and Omaha. This year was different with all the rain.

Plant problems related to continually saturated soils include lawn yellowing, dieback of recently planted trees or leaf edges of young trees turning brown, leaf yellowing in annual flowers, and dieback of perennial flowers. Too much water in the landscape is just as harmful as too little. Plant roots require oxygen and roots grow best when soils contain 15%-25% oxygen. If soil is saturated, the pore spaces fill with water and oxygen becomes unavailable to roots. At a 5% oxygen level, roots stop functioning and become susceptible to root rots. At 2% soil oxygen, roots die.



This summer there is no solid rule for how much or how often to water. Due to different soil types, growing conditions of a site, and plant types; one lawn or landscape bed may be fine with weekly watering while another requires twice a week or more frequent irrigation. It all depends on rainfall and soil water content and health of the plant roots. My best advice is before watering, check the soil to determine if moisture is needed. And if you do not know how to run your home watering system, please learn how to. Learn how much water you are applying, how often and by all means, obtain a rain gauge. Rain gauges will save money from your watering bill and help you save groundwater, a precious natural resource.

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