

## WATERING YOUR GRASS



**Perennial Lawn Grasses (Live year after year unless killed by disease or drought)** - Fescue lawns require more watering than summer grasses (Zoysia, Centipede, & St. Augustine). Fescue includes varieties such as 'Kentucky 31', 'Rebel', 'Winchester', 'Arid', 'Falcon', & others. Bahia grass is not recommended in Eastern North Carolina. Neither are perennial rye grasses nor blue grasses.

**Annual Lawn Grasses (Live one season, then die no matter what)**- Annual rye grass grows when seeded from September until May. It will always die in summer heat. Annual millets will grow from May until October. They will always die after the first frosts arrive. To conserve water & strengthen grasses, mow higher during hot & dry weather. Fescue should be mowed 3-4" tall. Zoysia should be mowed 2-3" tall. Bermuda grass, Centipede, and St. Augustine should be mowed to 1 ½".

To effectively water existing grasses, begin early in the day with an oscillating sprinkler & leave it in one place 3-4 hours. Measurements of water applied may be made with open coffee cans, cut off bottoms of milk jugs, or other wide mouth containers with straight sides. Be sure 1-2" of water has been applied in an area before moving sprinkler and hose to new location. Cease all watering by 3 p.m. to allow thorough drying by nightfall. Watering in the heat of the day wastes water to evaporation but is beneficial to the lawn on hot days. Wait 4-7 days to water again.

## WATERING YOUR GARDEN

As much as possible, withhold water from weeds & bare soil in the garden, reserving water for deep saturation of the roots of garden crop plants. Drip irrigation systems share water slowly with each crop plant in garden rows without wasting it on surrounding weeds or spraying it into the air where it is lost to evaporation. See your county Agriculture Extension Agent to learn about drip systems. You may purchase these systems or make them from recycled materials.

In the absence of drip systems, you may water with hoses attached to overhead sprinklers. This is very wasteful of water and encourages more weeds & diseases in the garden. If you water overhead, finish by 3 p.m. so all leaves will dry out by nightfall. Watering leaves at mid-day will cool them by evaporation. It will not burn the leaves as many people mistakenly believe. Check your water for salt at the Pasquotank Extension Center before watering the leaves of salt-sensitive crops such as beans, squash, cucumbers, pumpkins, & gourds.

When hauling water in buckets the old-fashioned way, conserve water by applying water carefully from a watering can with the sprinkler head removed. Place your hand over the spout opening to guide the stream of water to individual plants. You may wish to build small rings of garden soil, 4-7 days. compost, or mulch, 4" high, encircling each plant. Water poured gently into these craters will slowly filter down into the root zone of the plants. Give each large plant 2-4 gallons of water every 4-7 days. Each small plant can take 1 pint to 1 gallon every 4-7 days. Medium sized plants can require 1-3 gallons every Some species of plants require water every day. Others can go long periods without watering. Sandy soil types require water more frequently. Silt & clay soil types require water less often.

## Checking Your Water For Salt

A test of total dissolved salts may be obtained at no charge from the Pasquotank Extension Center. The test takes 5 seconds to conduct. Different wells & different surface waters may vary in salt content from time to time & location to location. A pint of unfiltered water in any container may be used. Water with a soluble salts index (SSI) of 0-30 is very safe, 30-50 is safe, & 50-80 may be used cautiously in furrows but not overhead. Eighty & above is hazardous to all but very salt tolerant plants.

## WATERING YOUR LANDSCAPE

The dry, sunny days and the sultry nights of spring are extremely hard on most garden plants. Drought & heat stress can be severely damaging to established plants, even resulting in plant death. Don't wait until plants look bad before you water them. When drought damage is evident, it is often too late to help. New plants need more frequent watering than older, established ones.

In spring, flower buds are being set on roses, hydrangeas, & crape myrtles. Fruit trees & vines are forming fruit, which produce later harvests. Bud & berry formation pull energy & moisture from the plant and cause stress. If the temperature is hot and water is in short supply, the plant is under additional stress. Fruiting trees & vines need constant soil moisture to swell fruits and keep them from dropping off or shriveling up. Azaleas, dogwoods, & hydrangeas are good indicators of moisture stress. Their leaves wilt, becoming limp & drooping, especially in the early afternoon when soil moisture is scarce.

Wilting turf will look bluish and footprints will be slow to spring back. Fescue requires more water than running warm season grasses. (See Watering Your Grass)

Dogwoods, hydrangeas, rhododendrons, camellias, boxwoods, azaleas, & turf grasses have shallow roots. They need more oxygen than deeper-rooted plants, so their roots grow near the surface where more air is present. This soil near the surface is the first to dry out. Apply at least 1 gallon per square foot of root surface area each time you water, which should be every 4-7 days. For the first year, plants need water at least every other day.

Light watering will not be adequate to supply plants' needs. Brief hosing of shrubs usually results in run-off and very shallow water penetration. Since roots grow towards moisture, shallow watering will encourage shallow root growth and these roots near the surface of the ground will dry out even more quickly in times without adequate rainfall.

To water deeply & encourage deep root growth, we recommend soaking the soil around shrubs & trees at least once a week when there is no rainfall or only scant showers. Place garden hose at base of shrub, turn it on ¼ of full flow and leave it in place for at least 1-3 minutes. This will allow water to soak deeply into the bed and supply the moisture needed. For larger trees, leave the hose on full flow under the tree canopy and move it around every 2 minutes until an area inside & outside the drip line is soaked deeply. Repeat this every 7-14 days.

Watering just before sundown is a traditional method but has been proven by research to promote diseases. Many leaf-spotting fungi germinate & start their infection in a thin film of free water on the leaf surface. Watering at mid-day has been shown to cool plants on hot days & proves beneficial to them. Water loss was higher through excessive evaporation at mid-day but plants were not burned by water droplets on the leaves. Research shows the leaves need not be watered at all. Keep leaves dry at all times if you can. They will have less disease.

If you wish to water overhead to wet the foliage, do so in the morning to mid-afternoon. All watering is best completed by 3 p.m. so leaves will dry thoroughly by nightfall, keeping fungi from growing during the night.

For further information on the landscape & garden, contact your county office of the

**North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service**

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