

## WATERING THE LAWN

Watering the lawn is a necessity for many homeowners who desire high quality turf. Correct irrigation ensures better density and growth, allowing the turf to compete more effectively with weeds and resist other pest problems. Healthy turf can offer outstanding water resource protection by significantly reducing surface runoff and soil erosion and by increasing the water infiltration rate into the soil.

The major factors involved in proper irrigation are the homeowner's desired level of maintenance, the soil conditions, the irrigation method, the weather conditions, and the timing of water applications. Setting goals for your lawn and how much lawn maintenance you're willing to commit to is the first step in determining your irrigation practices. If you desire a high- quality lawn and have an in-ground irrigation system, it will be easier to achieve your quality goal. Medium or low-maintenance lawns would not normally be irrigated and would be expected to go dormant in the summer during the hot, dry periods.

If you desire a green lawn throughout the summer, you have two choices. The first choice is following the traditional schedule of applying between 0.5 to 1.0 inch of water each week, depending on rainfall and temperatures. This method flushes salts from the soil, reduces weed competition, and tries to encourage deeper root growth. It is also the easiest schedule to follow if you do not have an in-ground irrigation system.

For those who do have an in-ground irrigation system, research from MSU has shown that light, daily watering may reduce some fungal and insect problems. Research has also revealed that grass roots naturally shorten in hot, dry weather so deep watering may not be as beneficial at this time as previously hoped. This makes a strong case for trying light, daily watering in dry weather. Apply 0.1 to 0.2 of an inch of water early each morning between 4 and 8 AM and consider setting your irrigation system for a short time in the early afternoon to cool turf during the heat.

The first time you water after applying fertilizer, a pesticide, or crabgrass preventer is the most critical for lawns. Watering too heavily after a chemical application creates a much higher potential of moving the product past the active plant growing zone in the form of runoff or leachate. Irrigating lightly, about 0.2 inches, after application will move the product into the thatch and root zone where it is intended to be. Once there, the potential

for it to move off the site is significantly reduced.

Michigan State University Extension, Master Gardener Training Manual, Lawns, P 26-27.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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