

Summer Lawns 101

The secret to achieving a healthy lawn in the summer is thorough, careful watering to encourage deep, drought-resistant roots. Both the frequency and amount of water required will vary with your climate, soil and lawn's needs. Here are some easy tips to help you look after your lawn in hot, dry weather.

- * Choose a time of day. Evening and early morning are the best times to water because less water is lost to evaporation than with midday irrigation.
- * Choose a watering method. Aboveground sprinklers cover large areas such as lawns most effectively. Use drip irrigation in arid climates, around shrubs and trees, and in gardens for maximum water efficiency and disease control.
- * Adjust sprinkler and drip systems. Set up overhead sprinklers so that water falls only on your lawn and not on sidewalks, roads or buildings. Adjust the water pressure of either type of system to allow water to penetrate the soil without running off.
- * Adjust the height of your mower blade. This drastically increases your lawn's survival chances during a drought. Sharp blades also help reduce the need for water because dull blades shred leaf tips, causing the turf to use more water than necessary.
- * Keep off the grass. Avoid walking on the grass during periods of drought. Mow lawns as little as possible during droughts to avoid additional stress, and never remove more than 1/3 of the leaf blade in one mowing. Allow mulched clippings to remain on the lawn to help cool the soil and retain moisture.
- * Aerate your lawn. Aeration improves the movement of water and nutrients into the soil, decreases run-off and encourages the roots of grass to grow deeply and to become more drought tolerant.

Lawn Repair and Renovation

Now is a good time to take a closer look at your turf and repair a damaged lawn. Whether your region has had a very dry summer or a wet one, your lawn is probably in need of some sort of maintenance. Follow these tips to find the right solution for your situation before the cooler weather sets in.

Repair first

Try to repair your lawn instead of ripping it up. Fix only those areas that need it, and give your entire lawn a good dose of TLC with some fertilizer and weed killer. Match the new with the existing so you get a nice, natural blend. For example, if you live in the north and have a blend of Kentucky bluegrass with a few dead spots that didn't green-up in spring, plant more Kentucky bluegrass. Avoid putting in different types of grass that shouldn't be mixed.

Remove & fill in

Remove dead grass with a shovel to expose bare soil. Trim up the sides of the area being removed so they're straight. Fill in the area with new topsoil, so the new is level with the old. When planting your seeds, don't bury them in the ground. Use just enough topsoil to barely cover them. After covering, press down on the dry soil with the back of a hoe, or use your shoe and lightly tamp it down.

Lay sod

If you're laying sod, remove enough soil to match the depth of the existing lawn. Make sure the sod edges fit tightly to each other and the existing lawn. If you can find sod that matches your lawn, it'll be easy to repair the damaged areas.

Fertilize

Apply about two pounds of 10-10-10 "starter" fertilizer per 1000 square feet. Divide the amount of fertilizer proportionally to fit the area that's in need of repair. Head to The Home Depot and check out our great selection of fertilizers, including brands such as Vigoro and Scott's.

Water thoroughly

Keep the sod moist but not wet. Water carefully and firm the sod lightly after laying. Once the seeds germinate, keep the soil evenly moist and increase the amount of water, but cut back on the number of times you water. It usually takes about three weeks for sod to root in well. Water daily until the lawn is established.

Don't mow

Leave for a few weeks and avoid walking on the areas. Don't mow until the seeds are about 2"- 3" tall, about three weeks after the seeds first germinate. Also steer clear of using any weed controls on the new grass for a couple of months until it gets really established. To ensure that you never cut more than one-third of the grass blade, avoid setting your mower on a low setting.