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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

DENNIS SMITH
COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT
GREGG COUNTY

Unfortunately the weather man has been accurate in predicting the rainfall the last couple of weeks and many homeowners are now starting to irrigate their lawns. It is very important that supplemental water be applied wisely and not wasted. Applying excess amounts of water to lawns in the spring will result in a turfgrass plant with a shortened, weak root system going into the hot, dry summer months. As a general rule apply 1.0 inch of water per week in the spring and fall months and 1.5 to 1.75 inches of water in the heat of summer if adequate rainfall does not occur. A majority of warm season turfgrass can survive with less water!

Rather than watering on the same schedule each week, adjust your watering schedule according to the weather. Irrigate deeply. Then wait until the grass begins to show signs of drought stress before watering again.

Symptoms of drought stress include grass leaves turning a dull, bluish color, leaf blades rolling or folding and footprints that remain in the grass after walking across the lawn. To time watering properly, look for the area of the lawn that shows water stress first. Water the entire lawn when that area begins to show symptoms.

A lawn that is watered deeply should generally be able to go 5 to 8 days between waterings. Established lawns with depth, extensive root systems sometimes can be watered less often. However, if soil is less than 5 inches deep, irrigation may need to be more frequent.

Early morning is the best time to water. Wind and temperatures are usually the lowest of the day. That allows water to be applied evenly and with little loss from evaporation. Watering late in the evening or at night causes leaves to remain wet for an extended period of time, which increase the chance for disease.

Thoroughly wet the soil to a depth of 6 inches with each watering. Shallow watering produces weak, shallow-rooted grass that is more susceptible to drought stress.

Soil type, sprinkler style and water pressure determine how much water is needed to wet the soil to a depth of 6 inches and how long a sprinkler must run. Use the following steps to determine how long to run your sprinkler or irrigation system.

Set five to six open-top cans randomly on the lawn (cans with short sides such as tuna or cat food cans work best).

Turn the sprinkler head or system on for 30 minutes.

Measure and record the depth of water caught in each individual can.

Calculate the average depth of water from all of the cans. For example, you have used five cans in your yard. The amount of water found in the cans was as follows: 0.5 inch, 0.4 inch, 0.6 inch, 0.4 inch, and 0.6 inch. Add the depths together and then divide by the number of cans you used (five in this case).

$0.5 \text{ inch} + 0.4 \text{ inch} + 0.6 \text{ inch} + 0.4 \text{ inch} + 0.6 \text{ inch} = 2.5 \text{ inches}$, 5 cans = 0.5 inch of water in 30 minutes.

Use a garden spade or a soil probe to determine how deeply the soil was wet during the 30-minute time period. The probe will easily push through wet soil but less easily into dry areas.

From the amount of water that was applied in the 30-minute cycle and the depth that it wet the soil, you can then determine how long the sprinkler must run to wet the soil to a depth of 6 inches.

In this example, the system put out .5 inch of water in 30 minutes, wetting the soil 3 inches deep. Therefore, 1 inch of water will need to be applied to wet the soil to a depth of 6 inches, giving a total watering time of one hour.

In some soil, especially heavy clay, it is difficult to irrigate 6 inches deep. Never apply water to the point of run-off. Water lost as run-off finds its way to sidewalks or cement gutters. If a sprinkler applies water faster than the soil can absorb it, stop irrigating until the surface dries and then resume watering.

Dennis Smith can be contacted at the Gregg County Extension Office by e-mail at dq-smith@tamu.edu or telephone at: 903-236-8429.

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