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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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LAWN WATERING

Unfortunately, hot dry weather is here for East Texas. Homeowners can maintain a lush lawn through proper irrigation practices. Keeping our lawns green can be a challenge even with a good irrigation system. Water is one of the basic elements of lawn maintenance and often one of the costliest.

Soil type, grass species and turf management influence the amount of supplemental water and the watering frequency required for lawns.

Sandy, coarse-textured soils absorb water at a much faster rate than finer textured soils, but retain less moisture. Therefore sandy soils will require more frequent applications of water at lighter rates. Clay soils retain more moisture and should require less frequent waterings. Clay soils absorb water very slowly so application rates should be slower and extended over a longer period.

Grass species and management practices largely determine the amount of supplemental water required for lawns. Bermuda grass is able to go dormant during a drought and recover fairly well. Other grasses such as Centipede and St. Augustine do not possess this drought tolerance. Significant turfgrass loss can occur if these species are allowed to experience severe drought stress for an extended period of time.

Management also influences the amount of water needed to maintain a healthy green lawn. Frequent fertilization and close mowing tend to increase the amount of watering required. Applications of soluble nitrogen fertilizers during the late spring and summer months significantly increase water use. Spring and fall fertilizer applications meet most grass requirements for nutrients without significantly increasing water needs. When lawns appear yellow because of iron deficiency, apply iron sulfate or iron chelate to improve color without increasing water needs.

During hot, dry conditions raise mowing heights to reduce water needs. Mow St. Augustine grass at 3 inches during dry weather. Do not mow bermuda grass higher than 2 inches.

Timely applications of water are required for effective and efficient water use. Apply water just as the grass begins to discolor and wilt. Most grasses turn dark and dull and the leaf blades begin to fold or roll when the grass goes into water stress. Grass under water stress also shows tracks after someone walks across the lawn.

The time of day also influences the effectiveness of watering. Early morning is considered the best time to water. Early morning waterings helps to wash dew off the leaves which reduces the incidence of diseases. Later afternoon is considered the worst time to water because the grass remains wet through the night and is more susceptible to disease.

How much water to apply to a home lawn can be very confusing for a homeowner with an automatic irrigation system. Unfortunately grasses do not utilize water on a set schedule.

Apply enough water to a lawn to wet the top 4 to 6 inches of soil. Light, frequent applications of water produce weak, shallow-rooted turf highly susceptible to stress. The application of 1/2 to 1 inch of water will adequately wet most soil. The time required to wet the soil to this depth depends on the type of sprinkler use, the water pressure available and the

rate at which the water moves into the soil. Sloping sites require light watering at frequent intervals.

The key to success in watering home lawns is to condition the grass to get by on as little supplemental water as possible. The use of good turf management practices will develop a deep-rooted turf which can withstand drought conditions.

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