

Lawns Can Look Good, Conserve Water
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The good news about lawn and landscape irrigation is that you can have your cake and eat it, too. Lawns and landscapes can be designed and maintained to be good looking and water conserving.

From University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension's John Fech, 10 useful tips to accomplish both objectives:

1. Measure the amount of water applied in a 15 minute period using collection devices such as tuna or coffee cans. Adjust the runtime to deliver the required amount.
2. Kentucky bluegrass lawns, in general, require 1 inch per week in April and May, 1 1/4 inch per week in June, 1 1/2 in July and August, 1 1/4 in September and 1 inch in October.
3. Use a screwdriver or soil probe to measure moisture (rainfall plus irrigation water) penetration into the lawn.
4. Water to the bottom of the roots. Use a small shovel to determine how deep the roots are. Actually the soil should be kept moist to about half an inch deeper than the deepest roots to encourage downward growth. Roots are shallow in summer and deeper in spring and fall.
5. When watering on a slope, use "delayed starts." Run your sprinklers until you notice runoff, then stop. Wait three hours, then resume. Aerate to increase infiltration.
6. Water early in the morning (4 to 10 a.m.). This allows the grass blades to dry, making them less susceptible to foliar diseases. Watering is more efficient in morning due to less evaporation and wind speed. Change the time that your system runs monthly, or at least seasonally. Contact a lawn sprinkler professional if you need help.
7. Observe your sprinkler system once per month. Look for heads that don't turn, heads that spray into the street or onto a sidewalk, bent or damaged heads, clogged or worn nozzles or orifices, turf growth around heads that impede water delivery, puddling and runoff.
8. Adjust heads as landscape plants grow larger and begin to block the spray pattern. New installations of benches, decks, etc. can also decrease irrigation efficiency.
9. On days when temperatures are above 90 degrees, run your sprinklers 5 to 10 minutes per zone in the afternoon to cool the turf and reduce stress. This is called "spritizing," and it reduces the symptoms of summer patch disease.
10. Create water zones by putting plants together that have similar water needs. Each turf species has a different water requirement which is also distinct from ornamentals. Ornamental plants should be grouped into low, moderate and high water users. Each zone of plants should be irrigated according to its needs.

How about taking the 100 Gallon Challenge this summer? The goal is to save 100 gallons of water a week, making changes in both indoor and outdoor practices.

Tips for outdoor water savings, along with potential savings per week:

- Water only between 4 and 8 a.m. to reduce evaporation; 40-70 gallons depending on lawn size.
- Adjust sprinklers to prevent spraying the street, sidewalk and driveways; 30-50 gallons.
- Reduce each lawn irrigation by two minutes; 50-90 gallons
- Use a bucket of soapy water to wash your car, using hose only for rinsing, and use self-closing nozzle; 30-70 gallons.
- Use a broom instead of a hose to clean driveways and small sidewalks; 20-40 gallons.
- Repair leaks in hoses, valves and sprinkler heads; 10-50 gallons.
- Repair or replace outdoor hose bibs; 90-100 gallons per bib
- Install drip irrigation for flowers, fruits and vegetables; 50-70 gallons.
- Install a "smart irrigation controller" that shuts irrigation system down when it rains; 60-100 gallons.
- Replace part of your lawn with drought-tolerant perennials and groundcovers; 30-50 gallons.

Note: Estimated savings assume reasonable home maintenance activities and traditional lawn watering pattern of one inch per week in April, May and October, 1 1/4 inch in June, 1 1/2 inch in July and August, applied equal amounts, twice a week. The 100 Gallon Challenge is adapted from the San Diego Water District.