



Texas Agricultural Extension Service

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Ten Water Smart Tips

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for a lower water bill
and a healthier lawn

Texas Agricultural Extension Service • Zerle L. Carpenter, Director
The Texas A&M University System • College Station, Texas



Water Smart Tips

1.

Water only when your lawn needs it.

Ideally a lawn should be watered just as it begins to wilt. Most grasses take on a dull, dark appearance and the leaf blades begin to fold or roll. Grass needing water will also show tracks when someone walks across it.

A common bermudagrass lawn should be able to go at least 5 days between waterings. Lawns grown on soils high in clay can go longer between watering than those on sandy soils.

2.

Give your lawn a long drink when you water.

If water applications are too light and too frequent, the turf tends to become weak and shallow-rooted making it more susceptible to heat and drought stress.

Water enough so that the soil is wet to a depth of 4-6 inches. One inch of water will wet most soil types to the desired depth.

Soil Type	Depth reached by one inch of water
Sand	12-18 inches
Sandy loam	8-15 inches
Loam	6-10 inches
Silt loam	6-8 inches
Clay loam	5-6 inches
Clay	3-6 inches

3.

Apply water to your lawn as evenly as possible.

To find out the distribution pattern of your sprinkler, set out 3 to 5 empty cans in a straight line going away from the sprinkler. Run the sprinkler for an hour, then measure the amount of water in each can. Each can should have approximately the same amount of water.

You might also consider installing an irrigation system. A well-designed system will generally improve distribution and efficiency over individual sprinklers, especially over hand-held sprinklers.

4.

Be careful not to over water.

Just as the lack of water has a damaging effect on plants, so does too much water. "Wet wilt" occurs when plants receive too much water or when soils do not drain properly. Saturated soil cannot provide oxygen to plant roots or release carbon dioxide.

5.

Plan and plant new yards for water efficiency.

Plant varieties of turfgrass and plants which have been bred specifically for your particular climate.

Sod rather than seed. Turfgrass sod requires 50 to 60 percent less water to establish a lawn than does seeding. Newly seeded or sprigged lawns should be watered lightly at frequent intervals until roots are established.

6.

Choose a turfgrass according to its ability to withstand hot, dry summers.

Most common turfgrasses cannot survive a typical Texas summer without water. Some, however, can tolerate much more stress than others. Common turfgrasses and their relative water needs are:

Turfgrass	Water requirements
Kentucky Bluegrass	Highest
Tall Fescue	
St. Augustine	
"Tif" Bermuda	
Zoysia	
Centipede	
Common Bermuda	
Buffalograss	Lowest

7. Water early in the morning.

The wind is usually calmer and the temperature lower early in the day, so less water is lost to evaporation. The worst time to water is late in the evening because the lawn tends to stay wet all night making it more susceptible to disease.

8. Improve the infiltration rate of your soil.

Average water infiltration rates vary according to soil types and conditions of the soil. Water penetrates sandy soil much faster than clay soil, so water must be applied at a slower rate to prevent runoff from lawns on clay soil.

Soil type also determines how fast water travels through the soil. In general, the average water infiltration rates are:

Soil Type	Inches per hour
Sand	2.0
Sandy loam	1.0
Loam	0.5
Silt loam	0.4
Clay loam	0.3
Clay	0.2

A non-ionic surfactant reduces the surface tension of water, thus making it move into and down in the soil at a faster rate. Another way you can improve the water movement into the soil is through the use of a core aerifier. This is a mechanical device that removes a core of soil several inches long. Water moves into these holes and deeper into the soil.

9.

Avoid fertilizers high in soluble nitrogen.

Apply slow soluble nitrogen materials such as ureaformaldehyde or sulfur-coated urea which control fast leaf growth while still providing a dark green color. Fertilizers with nitrogen in a soluble-fast release form such as ammonium-nitrate or ammonium-sulfate promote fast growth.

10.

Try to prevent or reduce wasteful water runoff.

Run sprinkler long enough to apply at least one inch of water or until runoff occurs. If runoff occurs first, stop sprinkler. Allow water to soak into the soil for half an hour and start sprinkler again. After you've determined how long it takes to properly water an area of your lawn, set a timer so that water will shut off automatically.

To reduce runoff from slopes, place sprinklers near the top of the slope and apply water slowly.

For more information, contact your county Extension office.

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