



Tips for a Healthy Lawn

A lawn can provide attractive recreational areas and help keep surrounding structures cool. It can, however, require considerably more water and care than desert-adapted plants, so consider limiting the size of your turf areas or looking into turf alternatives (i.e. shredded bark and shade trees for a play area). Follow these tips to help you maintain healthy, beautiful and water-efficient lawns.

Mowing

Avoid mowing too closely (scalping). Grass that is too short uses more water. Adjust mowers so the grass height is maintained within the ranges listed below:

Hybrid Bermuda	½ - 1 inch
Common Bermuda	1 ½ - 2 inches
Perennial rye	1 ½ - 2 inches

Your mowing schedule also is important. During the peak growing season, which in Arizona is the months of May through September, cut hybrid Bermuda grass kept at ½ inch in height every two to three days. If grass is kept at a height of 1", mow every 4 - 5 days. Mow common Bermuda grass to 1 ½ inches in height every five to seven days.

Tips

- Don't remove more than one-third of the grass at a time.
- Keep mower blades sharp.
- If you mow frequently, you shouldn't need to bag your clippings.
- Avoid following the same pattern each time you mow.
- Increase the mowing height by 25% in shady areas.

Fertilizing

Regular fertilizing is essential for proper growth and good color during the growing season. However, an over fertilized lawn will require more water and more frequent mowing. Do not fertilize more frequently than once a month, and follow the directions on the manufacturer's bag.

Tips

The best time to apply fertilizer is in the evening or early morning. Make sure to water the lawn thoroughly after fertilizing it. Additionally, consider applying ferrous sulfate or iron chelates. This will keep grass green without promoting excess growth. Use caution when applying near sidewalks, pool decks or patios, as iron can stain these areas. The application of soil sulfur twice per year has been shown to be beneficial. Applying too much fertilizer or applying too often is unhealthy for your grass and the environment. Instead of scheduling according to the calendar, look for signs that indicate the condition of your lawn (yellowing or off-color). Or just plan to apply your fertilizer on the 3 day weekends during the summer (Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day).

Water

The key to watering is to apply no more than necessary and to water deeply. Only water often enough to avoid wilt between waterings. During the hot summer months, water lawns **no more than once every three days**. Remember to water deeply. Water long enough to move water to a depth of 8 to 10 inches into the soil – you can use a probe or long screwdriver to check the

depth. The probe moves easily through moist soil and is resistant where the soil is dry. A lawn watering guide is available online at <http://ag.arizona.edu/AZMET/phxturf.html>. Homeowners also can usually find lawn-watering information in their local newspaper.

The best time to water is during the cool morning hours before 5 a.m. This helps minimize evaporation and prevents the growth of fungus.

Tips

- If water runs off the turf, irrigate more often for shorter periods of time.
- Adjust sprinkler heads so they don't spray walls, driveways or sidewalks.
- Replace broken and missing sprinklers immediately.
- Water shaded areas about 30% less than sunny areas.
- If it has rained, reduce irrigations accordingly.

Note: A typical residential lawn sprinkler system uses about 10 – 18 gallons per minute per valve or zone. If a lawn has two zones and waters for 15 minutes three times per week, the water consumption would range between 4,500 and 7,560 gallons per month.

Aerating

Aerating your soil will help relieve hard, compacted areas that cause puddling or runoff and inhibit root growth. The best time to aerate Bermuda grass is in May or June, when the grass is growing quickly. Consider a manual spot aeration in high traffic areas.

Dethatching

Thatch is a mat of plant material consisting mainly of grass stems and roots. Excessive thatch is usually caused when turf areas are over watered or over fertilized. If thatch is over one-half inch (check by digging a 6" wedge of soil), it should be removed. Dethatch during the hot summer months when Bermuda grass is growing at its fastest rate so it can quickly recover.

Weed, Disease and Insect Control

The best weed, insect and disease control is a healthy lawn. For additional information try:

Weeds – <http://ag.arizona.edu/urbanipm/weeds/weeds.html>

Diseases – The Karsten Turf Research facility has information available on-line at <http://ag.arizona.edu/turf/tt.htm>

Insects – The Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Manual has an entire chapter on insect control <http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/mg/entomology/index.html>

**Compiled with information from Desert Lawn Care Guide from the Arizona Municipal Water Users.*

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Be sure to visit the Town of Gilbert Water Conservation web pages for free landscape workshops, landscaping tips, water audits, frequently asked questions and more.

<http://www.ci.gilbert.az.us/water>



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