

July 9, 2015

AGRIVIEW

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I know we have had more than our fair share of rain this year, but the hot, dry days of summer are just around the corner . . . maybe. Keeping our lawns green in July and August can be a challenge even with a good irrigation system. Watering 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 tolerant. Significant turfgrass loss can occur if these species are allowed to experience severe drought stress for an extended period of time.

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 watering helps to wash des 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 scheduled.

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 ½ to 1 inch of water will adequately wet most soils. The time required to wet the soil to this depth depends on the type of sprinkler used, 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.

HAY STORAGE:

Hay storage losses vary greatly depending upon several factors, but storage technique is of utmost importance. Losses of dry hay stored inside a barn are usually of little concern. However, even for barn stored hay, losses rise sharply as moisture levels increase above 20% and losses from round bales stored outside under adverse conditions can be much larger. During storage, hay can be subject to dry matter losses as well as losses of forage quality.

If hay is to be stored outside, it is desirable to locate the storage site close to the feeding area because bales become more difficult to handle as they weather. It is easier to move them a greater distance when they are new and tightly wrapped.

Well-drained upland storage sites are best. Bottom areas should generally be avoided as they tend to be heavier soils. Also, many bottom areas are prone to flooding, which is detrimental to hay and may limit vehicle access during rainy periods. Hay/soil contact should be avoided if at all possible, but if hay must touch the soil, a sandy well-drained area is greatly preferable to a heavy soil and/or poorly drained site.

Once the storage site has been located, attention should be given to bale placement and orientation. Except when multiple-bale covers are used, large round bales should be stored in rows with sides not touching so as to avoid creating a moisture-holding area between sides. However, the flat ends of bales should be firmly butted against one another. This conserves space and may help protect the bottoms of bales (other than the one on the upper side of the slope) from water flowing down the slope. Properly done, this protects the ends almost as well as if they were part of one continuous bale.

If possible, rows should run north and south so as to allow maximum exposure of the rounded sides to the sun. This increases drying of the rounded surface of bales during the day. At least 3 feet should be left between bale rows to ensure sunlight penetration and allow good air circulation.

If direct hay/soil contact cannot be avoided, taking steps to minimize the amount of water reaching the bales, and the length of time they stay wet, will at least help. A gently sloping site (preferably with a southern exposure to maximize solar drying) will allow water to quickly drain away from the hay. Bales should be oriented up and down the slope so that they will not create a dam for surface water and placed near the tip of the slope to minimize the amount of water flowing around the hay.

IMPORTANT DATES:

- July 14th** - **Ranching 101 - Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center - Athens - 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. - 2 C. E. U.'s**
- **Ranch Gathering - Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center - Athens - 6:00 p.m.**
- July 16th** - **Henderson County Master Gardeners - Summer Series #2 - Fall Vegetable Production "*Science and Sense*" - 6:00 pm - Cain Center, 915 S. Palestine, Athens - FREE**
- July 25th** - **Hunter Education Class - 7:30 a.m. - Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, Athens - 903-676-2277 for more information and to register**

QUESTION OF THE WEEK:

Q. My flower beds are being invaded by giant wasps. What are they?"

A. These large (1.5 inches) black and yellow wasps are a nuisance in landscape during the time of year when cicadas are present in shade trees. These cicada killer wasps appear formidable because of their size and appearance. The male cannot sting and the female will not sting unless forced to do so. The female will dig a gallery in lawns or flower beds where they raise their young larvae. This nesting activity may damage lawns or flower roots. When control is necessary, sprinkle about one tablespoon of carbaryl (Sevin® dust) into the burrow. Be sure to read and follow the insecticide label directions.

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