



## **Homeowners Can Prepare Their Lawn for Possible Drought**

Homeowners, armed with a weather forecast predicting severe drought can take proper preparations that can greatly improve the chances of their home lawn surviving, even with very limited water. The Lawn Institute has assembled the following tips to manage turf during a drought.

1. Reduce or eliminate nitrogen fertilizer because at this time of year it overly promotes leaf growth, at the cost of rooting activity. Plan on fertilizing in the fall when top growth slows-down and root growth increases.
2. Avoid all weed killers (herbicides) because they can also lessen the vigor of grass roots and that's the last thing you want to do prior to or during a drought.
3. Reduce thatch and compaction as early in the year as possible so that moisture and air can reach the roots as easily as possible. Thatch can act like a sponge, capturing water before it reaches roots while compaction will increase rapid runoff at the cost of deep saturation.
4. Sharpen the mower blade several times during the turf-growing season because dull blades shred rather than cleanly cut grass and the leaves of shredded turf can greatly increase water loss.
5. Mow less or when it's cooler because no matter how you cut it, grasses lose moisture after every mowing. Less plant moisture will be lost when mowing takes place at cooler times of the day.
6. Mow as high as possible to promote deep rooting and maximize soil shading. Although studies have shown that taller grasses can use more water, there is a greater benefit to deep roots and reduced soil moisture loss from evaporation.

7. Leave clippings, not clumps to add moisture, nutrients and a mulching effect; however, remove clumps because they will block the sun and heat up as they decay, killing the under-lying grass.
8. Water Right...defend your right to use water to save your landscape by participating in public water hearings, while practicing proper watering techniques.
  1. Water early in the morning to take advantage of cooler temperatures and less evaporative losses to the afternoon winds and hot sun.
  2. Water infrequently and deeply to encourage roots to go deeper where moisture remains available for longer periods of time.
  3. Let the grass go dormant naturally by withholding water, except for a quarter-inch every four to six weeks to keep the vital grass crowns hydrated and capable of greening up when temperatures cool and moisture is again available.
9. Reduce traffic on the lawn at all times if possible, but especially during the heat of the day when foot traffic and even lawn mowers can injure the grass plants and cause almost immediate dehydration. When cooler, wetter weather returns you can help your lawn recover from a drought by watering deeply. This will wash dust off the leaves, re-hydrate the dormant crowns and initiate root growth.

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