

Watering your Texas lawn... how do you know how much is enough?

The simple answer to how much is enough is that you should water when plants need water. Of course many variables can affect this. Different plants have different water needs. Soils have different water-holding capacities. Sprinkler systems differ. Some plants have a protective layer of mulch. As the temperature rises and the day lengthens, transpiration (water loss from the leaves) and evaporation from the soil increases. So June's lawn watering schedule will differ from the schedule used later in the summer.

Watering infrequently and deeply is the key to forcing grass and plants to grow deep roots so they can access water for a longer period of time and thrive through the long, hot summer. Water close to the surface evaporates long before the deeper moisture. Homeowners who water every other day are overwatering. Air is forced out of soil that is continually saturated. Since roots need air, overwatering tends to promote very shallow roots.

As a general rule, proper watering means applying 1 to 1-1/2 inches of water per week. How long you run your sprinkler system depends on how much water the system applies. To figure out how long to run your system or sprinkler, place small empty 1 inch deep cat food or tuna cans (at least 3) over the area the sprinkler covers.

Water the length of time you think is correct. Each can should have the same amount of water, about 1 inch. If the cans contain less than 1 inch of water, you need to water longer. If the cans have an uneven amount of water, the distribution of water needs adjustment. Apply enough water to wet the soil to a depth of 4-6 inches.

Use a sprinkler that emits large drops of water that remain close to the ground, not one that sprays a fine mist into the air. Water during the early morning or evening hours since evaporation losses will be up to 60 percent higher during the day. Do not water on windy days, and set the sprinkler so that the lawn is watered, not sidewalks and driveways. Consider adding a rain sensor for your sprinkler system.

Remember not to cut the grass too short. Longer blades of grass will reduce evaporation and root stress since shaded soil will not dry out as quickly. Be sure to control any insects that attack your lawn quickly and completely.

A reasonable amount of fertilizing is necessary to develop the root system and to help keep the lawn healthy. Too much fertilizer, however, will lead to excessive growth, which will then require more watering. Many experts recommend leaving the grass clippings on the lawn, which will minimize the need for additional fertilizer.

Add a little color...

Color looks great by the front door or in the back yard where you can see it from a window or the patio, and adding a small flower-bed or a container can make a great impression.

Measure the area and figure out how many square feet it is to help you determine the number of plants and how much soil amendments and mulch to purchase. If a plant grows 2 feet wide, you need one plant every 2 feet. If the plant grows 6 inches wide, you need a plant every 6 inches. Once plants are in the ground, cover the soil with a good layer of mulch and water it gently. The water will settle the soil and mulch. Water every day for about a week if it does not rain. 💧

