

Super summer lawns

It's summertime, a great time for us to go outside and enjoy our home landscapes! Unfortunately, not everything in the backyard is happy now. In fact, our lawns hate the heat.

Most lawns in North Dakota begin to turn yellow and go dormant in the summer heat. This is a natural way for our lawns to survive.

It's okay—there is nothing wrong in letting your lawn take a summer nap. You can take a break from lawn care, too. You can both be happy.

But many of us don't like a yellow lawn in the summer. If this includes you, let's talk about summer lawn care.

The first concern is watering. There's an old trick to see if your lawn is thirsty. Take a walk across

your lawn and look back at your tracks. If you can see your footprints in the grass, the lawn needs a drink.

Lawns need 1 to 1 1/2 inches of water per week, either from you or Mother Nature. **Water deeply.** It's better to give your lawn a big gulp of water rather than a series of sips. That's because roots grow where the water is. If you give the lawn a big gulp and water deeply, you will develop a *deep* root system. On the other hand, if you only sprinkle the surface of the soil, you will create a *shallow* root system.

If you have a clay soil, irrigate only once or twice a week. Sandy soils can't hold a full inch of water. These soils should receive a half-inch of water two or three times per week when needed.

Now you may be asking: How do I measure inches of water?

Here's how: Set up some containers around the lawn. Keep the sprinkler going and measure the time it takes until the proper amount of water falls into the containers. Use this as your base time for future watering.

Watering in the morning is best. The grass plants are active and will absorb the water they need. Any extra water will evaporate, keeping the grass blades dry and preventing diseases. Watering during the middle of the day is not recommended since much of the water you apply will evaporate before the plants absorb it. The worst time to irrigate is in the evening since the lawn will stay wet all night, leading to diseases.

Here are a few more ways to keep your lawn happy this summer:

Your grass will be healthier and less thirsty if you **let your grass clippings fall to the ground.** These clippings will

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shade the soil surface, keeping it cool.

You should also ***mow your turf tall***—the taller the better. A tall turf will shade the soil, keeping it cool. A taller turf naturally develops a deeper root system, protecting your lawn against drought damage. The first lawns in the neighborhood that turn yellow are lawns that are mowed short.

Avoid using weed killers on your lawn in the summer. You will have better success at killing weeds in September. Herbicides add extra stress to lawns, which are already under stress from the heat. There is also the risk of the herbicide drifting into your garden, causing these plants to curl and/or die.

Don't be too worried about grubs or other insects. Less than 5% of our lawns need treatments for insect pests. Before treating, make sure that you actually have a pest problem. Get a shovel and dig a few inches deep along the edges of emerging brown spots. The grubs, which are creamy white in color and the size of your pinkie finger, will be munching on the grass roots.

Don't burn the lawn with fertilizer. Yellowing lawns do not need fertilizer; but if you irrigate all summer, a light fertilization might be necessary. Use about one-half the suggested rate. Organic fertilizers are especially useful in summer since they are less likely to burn the grass.

Whether or not you actively take care of your lawn in summer, expect the lawn to wake up when temperatures cool off. Autumn will be the best time to reseed, kill weeds, and develop a strong root system heading into winter. 