



*This article provided by courtesy of Craig R. Miller,
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IRRIGATION & LAWN CARE GUIDELINES FOR HOMEOWNERS

Practicing the following guidelines can decrease water use by up to 30% over the course of the growing season:

- Wait to activate your sprinkler system as late into the season as possible depending on the weather. Sprinkler systems should not be set to run until mid-to late May at the earliest. By starting later, you will encourage grass roots to seek water and grow deeper. When hot, dry summer days arrive, the deeper root system means the grass can go longer between waterings.
- When you start up your system, go through each zone to check for problems and make repairs. Be sure to check for any leaks in the system, especially at the backflow preventer and in the valve boxes. This is the time to adjust all the heads to ensure the water is being applied to the correct areas, and not to the sidewalks and driveway!
- Set the controller to water only half the amount your landscape will typically need in July. Consider decreasing the number of days in half and not the time per zone. As an example, if you typically are running your irrigation for 10 minutes per zone every 3rd day in July, set the controller to run 10 minutes per zone every 6th day in spring and fall. This way, the water applied always goes to the same depth, keeping the depth of your turf roots consistent throughout the year.
- When determining the watering needs of planted areas, dig down about 4 to 6 inches to determine the moisture content of the soil. Do not worry about the dryness of the top inch of soil. If the soil is too dry to form a ball when squeezed in the hand, it needs water. Never water if the soil is still wet.
- Water all plants deeply but infrequently to encourage deeper, healthier rooting. Prolonged intervals between watering (short of drought damage) will provide maximum encouragement of plant growth.
- Aerate the lawn in the **spring** and again in the **fall** to obtain these benefits:
 - Improved water penetration into compacted soils and through thatch and mat layers.
 - Compacted soil is loosened, increasing the availability of water and nutrients.
 - Enhanced soil oxygen levels, which stimulates root growth and the activity of thatch-decomposing organisms.
 - Enhanced turfgrass shoot and root development.
 - Reduced water runoff.
 - Increased turf drought tolerance.
- Check thatch depth occasionally to determine the need for corrective procedures. More than ½" will be problematic.
- Make sure aeration plugs are at least 2" to 3" in length for best results (the longer the plug, the better!).
- Use core-type aerators to loosen the soil, rather than spike-type aerators, which compact it.
- A properly fertilized lawn requires less water. Applying more fertilizer than is needed can deplete other nutrients and cause deficiencies.
- Generally, for low-maintenance bluegrass lawns (common throughout Colorado), fertilize lightly (one-half pound of N/1,000 sq. ft., or a half rate) in the late spring (@ Memorial Day) and again in early summer (@July 4th). Your final application should be one pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. (a full rate) in the fall (October)
 - 20-10-10 fertilizer contains 20% nitrogen (N)
 - A bag that weighs 25 pounds would contain 5 pounds of N
 - Applied to 5,000 square feet of turf = 1 pound of actual N/1000 sq. ft.
 - Half the bag would provide ½ pound of N/1000 sq. ft.
- Mow the lawn no lower than 2 ½ inches (3" to 4" better!).
 - The higher the lawn is mown, the deeper the roots
 - Sharpen your mower blades regularly!