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Do You Want a Lawn or a Trout Farm?

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GARDEN NOTES

DO YOU WANT A LAWN OR A TROUT FARM?

By Dennis Hinkamp

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If you start seeing men with hip waders and ugly hats in your yard, you may want to cut back on your watering.

Other signs of excess water include moss growing in the lawn or flowerbeds, mushrooms appearing everywhere except in the spinach salad and a musty odor coming from the soil says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist.

Plants that are over-watered develop a shallow root system and are more susceptible to root rot, iron chlorosis and other problems, he says. Watering everyday is too much and too often, regardless of the type of soil.

“It is amazing how many people tell me they have to water every day to keep their lawns from dying,” Goodspeed says. “Lawns look like they are dying sometimes because they have been babied and pampered their whole lives. The roots have never had to establish themselves deeper into the soil because water has always been available near the surface.

“Plants grow roots to reach the water that sustains their life. I have seen a landscape planted in a sandy, gravelly soil that is only watered every four or five days and the lawn looks great. The grass roots have been trained to grow deeper to allow for longer periods of time between watering.”

Weaning grass off of a heavy watering habit may take a little patience and time but will be worth it in the long run, Goodspeed explains. The first thing to do is get better acquainted with your watering system — find out how much water it puts out. Set five or six straight-sided cans in a random pattern on the lawn, then turn on the sprinklers for 15 minutes. Next, measure the amount of water found in each can, and calculate the average per can.

This indicates how many inches of water the sprinkler system puts out in 15 minutes, he adds. For example, the measurement in the cans is one-half inch applied in 15 minutes. Double that figure to find out that the system is watering one inch in a half hour. Even during hot summer days in July and August, most grass plants need between two and two-and-one-half inches of water a week. This means the sprinklers need to be turned on for one hour and 15 minutes each week.

In this example, divide that amount of water between two applications a week, he continues. That means the sprinklers need to be left on 35 to 40 minutes each time. If water tends to run off the lawn quickly due to a slope, it may be necessary to water in shorter intervals, but still all in the same day. One station could be left on for 15 minutes, then turned on an hour later to water that area another 15 minutes. This allows the lawn to absorb the first watering, then the second is able to penetrate deeper.

If you currently water every day, it may take a little while for the lawn to grow new roots and adapt to a new watering diet, Goodspeed says. Start by watering a little longer the first day, then none the next. For a couple of weeks, just water every other day.

“The lawn may give you a couple of dirty looks once it realizes you are cutting back on its supply, but it will thank you in the long run,” he says. “Once the lawn has adapted to every other day, water a little longer and cut back to every third day. Those ugly glares will start again, but eventually the lawn will be grateful you helped it kick a bad watering habit.”

Adapting to a new watering schedule will make the lawn tougher so it can better withstand diseases, insects and weed invasions, Goodspeed says. It will also be more prepared to handle hot weather and dry spells or drought conditions that may occur in the future.

For more information, contact your local [USU County Extension office](#).

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