

DROUGHT
SURVIVAL

101

Watering Your Lawn



CONTRA COSTA
WATER DISTRICT

1331 Concord Avenue
Concord, California 94520

925.688.8000

www.ccwater.com

DROUGHT
SURVIVAL

101



CONTRA COSTA
WATER DISTRICT

Lawns are Water Guzzlers

Lawns are generally the single biggest water user for a typical property. That means they offer the greatest potential for water savings. A 500-square-foot lawn can use more than 18,000 gallons of water per year!

If the only time you walk on your lawn is when you are mowing it, consider eliminating it & re-landscaping with permeable paving materials and plants appropriate for our local climate.

Maintaining a Lawn During a Drought

If you have good reasons to keep your lawn, here are some simple maintenance practices that will help it survive the drought.

- Mow lawns 2½-to-3 inches high. Taller grass blades will promote deeper roots and the taller grass will shade the soil, resulting in less water evaporating from the soil.
- Mow weekly so that you don't remove more than the top one-third of the grass blades.
- Keep lawn mower blades sharp. Dull mower blades shred grass tips, causing the lawn to look brown.
- Don't fertilize. Actively growing plants use more water, and fertilizers can damage already stressed root systems.
- Trim the grass adjacent to sprinkler heads to ensure the sprinkler spray is not blocked.
- Never mow your lawn when the soil is wet. This will result in soil compaction.
- Keep foot and equipment traffic on the lawn to a minimum. Drought-stressed turf is more easily damaged by traffic.
- Leave clippings on the lawn as you mow. This will feed small amounts of nitrogen back to the soil.
- Be willing to accept a less than lush lawn during the drought.

Watering a Lawn During a Drought

Managing the water that you apply to your lawn is essential.

Here are a few tips:

- Reduce the watering schedule. During normal years, lawns only require water two to three days per week in spring and fall and three to four days per week in the middle of summer. However, during the drought, lawns can survive on considerably less water. Depending on your reduction goal, reduce the number of watering days per week; reduce the minutes of watering per day; or reduce both. The lawn won't look its best, but it will survive.
- Check your sprinkler heads every few weeks to make sure they are operating properly. Repair broken, bent or sunken heads and clogged nozzles. Adjust the spray pattern to prevent sprinklers from watering pavement.
- Water early in the morning between 3AM and 8AM. The temperatures are cooler, wind is calm and there is little evaporation.
- Watch your lawn rather than a calendar. If your lawn takes on a blue-grey tone or the grass blades don't spring back after you walk on it, it is time to water.
- To eliminate runoff and water waste, use the cycle and soak method of watering. For spray head sprinklers, water in three cycles, 3-6 minutes per cycle. For rotor heads, water in three cycles, 10-12 minutes each cycle. Space each watering cycle about an hour apart to allow the water to soak in.
- Make scheduling changes to your sprinkler timer every week based on the lawn's condition and your reduction goal.
- Hand-water small dry spots rather than turning up the watering schedule.
- Lawn areas in shade (north/east side of the house) will generally require 50 percent less water than lawns on the sunny side of the house. Adjust your watering schedule accordingly.