**Water Wisely**

Water is a precious natural resource that touches on every aspect of our society, from industry to recreation. We have come to rely on the ready availability of clean water at low cost, which unfortunately can lead to wasteful use. With increased demand for treated water comes increased energy costs and pressure on existing water supply infrastructure. It is incumbent on all of us to identify ways to conserve water at home. One simple step is to take a critical look at how we use water outside our home. The EPA estimates that 30% of residential water use is for outdoor applications, primarily lawn care. For the average household, this is about 100 gallons of treated drinking water that is used outdoors daily.

***Water and Lawn Care***. Water makes up between 80-90% of turfgrass mass. When this level drops below 60%, the grass will begin to wilt. An easy test to determine if your grass is at the wilt point is to walk across the lawn. If you leave footprints in the grass, your lawn is signaling you that it needs water. But how much should you apply? A general rule of thumb to remember is that turf requires about 1 inch of water per week during the summer season (May – September). During dry periods, irrigation may be necessary to supplement rainfall. If needed, set your sprinkler to cover as large an area that can be watered uniformly. Place shallow containers (like pet food cans or tuna cans) under the sprinkler to know when you have watered the equivalent of an inch of rain. If you are watering with a soaker hose, check to see that the water has soaked to at least four inches. Allow the soil to dry and perform the footprint test before watering again or keep track of rainfall on your calendar. The amount and frequency of supplemental irrigation water will vary throughout the summer and will require attention in order to maximize water use and limit waste. Occasionally, prolonged droughts occur over many weeks and municipalities may limit water for irrigation. In this case, allow your lawn to dry down and go dormant. Do not mow or otherwise walk across your lawn. The lawn will not look good during drought but should recover once rains begin again.

***Too Much is Too Much***. Overwatering is not just wasteful, it can kill your grass. When grass is overwatered the soil pore spaces become saturated. This action forces air out of soil pores, reducing the available soil oxygen. Low soil oxygen promotes shallow root systems and can hinder plant growth and make lawns very susceptible to occasional drought. Overwatering also contributes to nutrient loss, encourages weed growth, and makes turf more susceptible to disease.

***Best Practices to Conserve Water and Promote Healthy Plant Growth:***

- Choose drought tolerant turf and landscape plants suitable for your growing zone
- Aerate compacted soils to improve infiltration
- When irrigation is needed, water early in the morning to reduce evaporation
- Adjust sprinklers to keep water on the lawn and off the pavement
- Limit traffic on the lawn during hot and dry periods; mowing and foot traffic during drought can cause permanent damage and encourage warm season weeds
- Harvest rain water for future outdoor use

***Remember***! Irrigate only as a supplement for rainfall and only when your grass requires it. You will conserve water, reduce runoff from your lawn, and promote healthier turf.

References:
AGR-115 Irrigation Tips to Conserve Water and Grow A Healthy Lawn
HENV-601 Saving Water at Home
Link to EPA WaterSense web content: https://www.epa.gov/watersense/outdoors

**SOCIAL MEDIA**
**Description:** Overwatering wastes water and can damage turf
**Content:** Water makes up 80-90% of turfgrass mass. Your grass is telling you it needs additional water inputs if you leave footprints in the lawn. This is a sign of wilt. If you supplement with irrigation, water your lawn until you have applied about one inch of water to the soil surface. Allow the soil to dry until the grass reaches the wilt point before watering again. This will encourage deep root systems and stronger plants that will require less watering over time.

For more conservation tips, check out the following publications:
AGR-115 Irrigation Tips to Conserve Water and Grow A Healthy Lawn
HENV-601 Saving Water at Home