

## **Hot Weather Lawn Care**

Few things can compare to walking barefoot across a lush, well-maintained lawn in the heat of the summer. Problem is, this heavenly feeling doesn't usually come without planning and work. Once the flower beds are in and we are harvesting tomatoes, the lawn work continues and continues until the end of the growing season. For the most part, the lawn requires as much, if not more, consistent attention than any other part of our landscape design. Let's start with a brief discussion of the two basic lawns: cool-season and warm-season grasses.

As a rule, the lush lawn we talked about will not be a cool weather lawn. Cool-season grasses such as fescue, bluegrass, and rye grow best when temperatures are in the 60s and 70's. Once temperatures get into the 80s and above, these lawns will begin to struggle a bit. Growth will slow, color may fade, and lawns will show signs of wear and tear as they are less able to recover from stress and traffic. As temperatures soar above 90 degrees, some cool weather lawns may even go dormant, looking brown and brittle until early fall. Either water your lawn regularly and deeply, or don't water at all. If your lawn does go brown and dormant, don't try to "water it back to life"; it should stay that way until fall. Don't worry - it should recover once the weather changes. Do not fertilize cool season lawns in summer. Fertilizing will promote new growth and add to the stress, so hold off fertilizing until late summer (September) and fall (November).

Warm-season grasses including Bermuda, Zoysia, St. Augustine, and Buffalo grass like temperatures into the 80s and, with help, can thrive 90s and above. The lawn will need all the help it can get, so here are some important points:

- **Water Wisely (deep and infrequent!):** Lawns need at least one inch of water per week, and more when the heat is severe. Water deeply and less frequently to encourage roots to grow deep and become drought-tolerant. Water early in the day to reduce evaporation and fungal growth.
- **Mowing Tips (get your spouse to do it!):** Raise your mower blade in the summer. Taller grass is more drought-tolerant, grows deeper roots, and helps shade the earth to cool the soil and to prevent weed seeds from

germinating. Mulching grass clippings helps keep moisture levels steady and supplies nitrogen. Keep mower blades sharp so the leaves get cut, not torn or shredded.

- Fertilizing and cultivating: Warm weather lawns should be fertilized roughly once a month during growing season (April to August) at the rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet of lawn. A high nitrogen fertilizer is best for green lush lawns; most yards don't need potassium and phosphorus. You can confirm this by have a soil test performed. Look for a 30-0-4 or similar fertilizer. Other than watering, fertilizing, and mowing, do nothing else. Summer is not the time for weed control, aerating, or de-thatching as these can add stress to the lawn.

Excellent resources are available through the Master Gardener office or on the Tulsa Master Gardener website. Look for:

[OSU Factsheet L-441](#): Bermudagrass Lawn Management Calendar

[OSU Factsheet L-442](#): Cool Season Lawn Management Calendar

[OSU Factsheet L-444](#): Lawn Watering Tips