

Water wise

Get a greener lawn for a little less green

BY SEAN COKER

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The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that half of the water used on residential lawns is lost to wind, evaporation and over-watering. Using a few simple and low-cost steps homeowners keep their lawns green, minimize water usage and encourage the preservation of this valuable resource.

Jim Lewis, owner of Lewis Landscaping in Beaverton, is raising the bar when it comes to water efficiency.

“A proper irrigation system can reduce water waste by 50 percent,” Lewis explains near a jobsite in western Beaverton. “Underground irrigation systems are twice as efficient as a ground hose and sprinkler setup. You have greater coverage, while minimizing runoff and overspray [with an underground irrigation system].”

If you already have an existing sprinkler system, consider switching to pressure-sensitive sprinkler heads, which Lewis figures can reduce water consumption by 25 percent, equaling a “\$30- to \$50-per-month reduction in water savings.”

But a greener lawn does not have to cost a lot of money, just time and some preventive maintenance.

Time to water

Water your lawn in the early morning, when the temperature is cool and the winds are low. This ensures that water reaches the soil, whereas watering mid-day means most of the water is lost to evaporation and wind. Avoid watering at night because the standing water can promote mold. One inch of water per week is enough for most lawns when temperatures are below 85 degrees, but during hot summer months switch to using 1½ inches of water. Remember, rainwater counts as well.

Installing rain sensors to your automatic sprinkler system will scale back or eliminate redundant watering on rainy days. Sensors can start at \$20 for wired sensors to hundred of dollars for wireless, Evaporative Transpiration (ET) controllers. ET sensors receive local weather signals and adjust water amounts and times depending on rainfall, wind speed, outside temperatures, relative humidity, solar radiation and soil type.

The Tualatin Valley Water District, which serves Aloha, Beaverton, Sherwood and Tigard, offers rebates from \$25 to \$200 to customers who install water saving devises for their back yard. Other municipal water districts offer similar rebates.

Hole lot of room to grow

Aerating involves puncturing a series of small holes in your grass, allowing oxygen and water to penetrate deeper into the grass to better nourish the lawn. Soil drainage is improved, roots have more room to grow and the increase in oxygen encourages worms.

Over time, soil compacts under use, which inhibits nutrients and water from reaching the grass' roots. A core aerator reduces soil compaction by removing small sections of soil, called plugs.



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Jim Lewis, owner of Lewis Landscaping, adjusts a water-efficient sprinkler head at a client's home in Beaverton, it sprays the lawn more evenly and wastes less water. Installing an efficient system also can get the homeowner a rebate in some water districts.

Renting a gas-powered, core aerator runs for typically \$65 a day, but professional companies like Lewis Landscaping can also provide this service.

Aerating sandals can be bought for \$20, but the holes provide only aeration and can exacerbate soil compaction. Lawns should be aerated once or twice a year, with spring and fall being the best choices.

“Lawns require three times more water on average than planter beds do,” explains Lewis. “Try separating your irrigation system into zones that water lawn areas and planting beds at different times, and this will result in a lot of water savings.”

Drip irrigation involves dripping water directly onto plants or roots and exemplifies water conservation. This method works well in planter beds, allowing users to water the certain areas exclusively. Grouping plants with similar watering needs together also makes watering more efficient.

As the water resources across the United States continue to be taxed by a growing population and increased demand per person, a little effort on all of our parts can ensure there is enough water for everyone’s lawn, so long as we water wisely.

Five tips to a vibrant lawn

Lewis gives us five tips to help obtain and maintain a vibrant lawn:

n If you can step on your grass and the lawn springs back, then it doesn’t need water. An empty tuna can can measure the amount of water your lawn receives.

n If you have an existing irrigation system, consider upgrading your system. A new water conservation controller, upgraded pressure-regulated heads, U-series or rotary nozzles can reduce your water usage by 35 percent.

n Give your existing irrigation system a tune-up. Over time, irrigation systems become misaligned, break and begin leaking or get clogged. All of these are relatively minor repairs that will result in a lot of water savings and cost more time than money.

n Water your lawn immediately after applying fertilizer to prevent burning of the lawn. This also activates the lawn so nitrogen becomes available in your soil immediately.

n When installing irrigation systems, use quality materials from industry leaders like Rain Bird. Saving money on materials will often result in problems down the road that will cost you more than you saved.

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For more information, contact:

n Lewis Landscaping – (503-524-3679 / www.lewislandscape.com)

n Tualatin Valley Water District – (www.tvwd.org)

n Environmental Protection Agency – (www.epa.gov)