

LAWNCARE - TLC DURING “THOSE LAZY, HAZY, CRAZY DAYS OF SUMMER”

By Maritta Perry Grau, Frederick County Master Gardener, June, 2025

Hot and humid summer months have arrived, so here are a few suggestions for watering and mowing your lawn during these “lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer.”

About that lawn

When we plant lawns, we tend to plant mono-turfs—all one type of grass, even though a mix of grass and other species attracts many more pollinators, stands up better to disease, and provides food and shelter for those pollinators, thus increasing plant yield. Studies have shown that even self-pollinating plants, such as tomatoes, egg plants, green beans, chili peppers, etc., give a better yield when pollinators visit.

I hear you. You need lawn space for the dogs to romp and for the kids or grandkids to play. But look around. Could you replace any area with a garden or even just green, no-mow groundcover? Most gardening experts do recommend less lawn, rather than more. Whether a postage stamp-sized lawn or more, we tend to care for the lawn on auto-pilot, fertilizing it in the spring and early fall, mowing it once or twice a week, and watering it when dry.

About fertilizing

With fertilizing, try to select a fertilizer that won't kill the other species of grasses in the lawn. If possible, consider using organic fertilizers. Remember, too, Maryland law forbids lawn fertilizing between November 15 and March 1, to help prevent stormwater run-off into our streams and rivers and subsequent pollution of the Bay.

About mowing

Keeping grass to a height of about 3–4 inches helps “maintain deeper roots and shading of the soil to enhance weed control. Leave the “clippings” for extra nourishment, “and never remove more than one-third of the leaf surface at each mowing,” says Dan Felice, Frederick County Master Gardener and professional landscaper.

About watering

With summer almost upon us, that third autopilot task—watering the lawn—is really important. Water is a limited resource, although thanks to our winter snows and recent heavy rains, we are no longer in a moderate drought in western Maryland according to the [Summary | U.S. Drought Monitor](#).

Many landscape plants do not need much water beyond natural rainfall once they are established. Native plants generally need less water, less tending, and conserve water better than do many ornamental, nonnative plants.

Although we rarely need to water a well-established lawn, a newly seeded/sodded lawn should be watered regularly until it is established, about two years. Cool season grasses like tall fescue and bluegrasses are recommended for our area. Both species naturally go into a semi-dormant state during summer's heat and drought, although the lawn usually recovers after a good rainfall.

So, when should you water the lawn? First, if your grass has gone into that dormant state, you'll probably see a slight change in color. Second, when you walk through the lawn, you'll probably leave visible footprints. Thirdly, and probably most importantly, test for moisture in the soil—dig down about six inches and check to see if the soil is dry. If so, then it's time to water. But be cautious—overwatering can damage the roots.

- Aim for one-half to one inch of water per application, but never more than the soil will absorb. It usually takes about two hours for the soil to be moistened to a depth of six inches. But be sure to check the soil moisture depth to see what works for your particular type of soil.
- Water early in the morning, before 10:00 a.m., thus reducing the potential for disease problems.
- Direct the water where it is needed—mainly to the roots.

About sprinklers and irrigation

Soaker hoses or drip irrigation hoses/systems use much less water and benefit the plants more than overhead watering with sprinklers or spray from a hose. The soaker/drip irrigation hoses allow you to water slowly and deeply, thus encouraging deep roots and better survival during droughts. On the other hand, frequent shallow watering encourages shallow rooting and the development of disease and insect problems.

If you have in-ground irrigation, you'll want to do a spring check-up every year; replace sprinkler heads as needed; and make sure the sprinkler heads are aimed so that water does not fall on paved surfaces. Also, if you don't have a rain shut-off device, you may want to get one. Its purpose is to override the system's timer when adequate rain has fallen.



Gardens and lawns don't always need extra water. The pollinator border in the lefthand picture was 4 old when this picture was taken. In the first year, the gardener used a soaker hose once a week for about two hours, when there had been no rainfall to encourage deep roots. Since then, the gardener has depended only on natural rainfall. The non-native hydrangeas on right were planted about 12 years before the picture was taken, and again, the gardener used a soaker hose every week for about one year, unless there had been a soaking rain. Since then, no water has been given, except during periods of no rain for 2–3 weeks.



(Photo courtesy of the Frederick County Master Gardeners' archive.)



When the lawn is stressed, walking on it may leave footprints. After checking soil moisture level at a depth of about five to six inches below the grass surface, you can decide whether or not it's time to water the lawn. (Photo courtesy of the Frederick County Master Gardeners' archive.)

Help from Frederick County Master Gardeners

However you care for your lawn, you'll find much information on this and other topics through the Frederick County Master Gardeners and the University of Maryland Extension Frederick Office —free seminars, Master Gardener certification classes, gardening information, advice, and publications, as well as other announcements. Or call us at 301-600-1596:

- Frederick County Master Gardeners' website, <bit.ly/FCMG-Home-Gardening>;
- Facebook, <https://bit.ly/FCMGFacebook>;
- Instagram, <https://bit.ly/FCMGinstagram>
- University of Maryland Extension Home and Garden Information Center, bit.ly/UME-HGIC;
- Frederick County Master Gardeners publications, <<http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening>>.

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