

## Proper Lawn Care

One of the biggest challenges faced by many during the summer months is keeping the lawn green, even though areas inevitably turn brown. When lawns are receiving proper care, they are far less likely to turn brown and have other problems with pests and disease. Lawns should be fertilized three to four times a year, and deep watered during hot weather twice a week for 30-40 minutes depending on the irrigation system. Lawn should also be mowed to a height of about three inches, and no more than one third of the height of the lawn should be cut at a time. A less effective solution to lawn problems is to increase overall irrigation and the amount of fertilizer applied to the lawn. Many times this can cause further problems, or make the original problem worse.

The first thing to check for in brown areas is drought stress. This is usually caused by an inefficient irrigation system or improper watering. To determine drought stress, insert a screwdriver into the soil. If it is difficult to insert the entire length, the soil is too dry. This can especially be seen when temperatures consistently start to warm above eighty degrees. A good solution is to water the dry areas with a hose-end sprinkler periodically instead of increasing the run time on all irrigation zones. These areas will begin to green-up within one to four weeks. Another method to determine when it is time to water the lawn, is when walked upon, visible footprints are left.

Another very common culprit for brown patches in the lawn are insect pests including white grub, various species of billbug, cut worms, sod web worm and cranberry girdler. To determine if insects are causing the damage, turf generally pulls from the ground easily with little or no roots attached. To determine what insect may be in your lawn, dig in border areas where brown and green grass meets and not in the middle of the brown patch itself. Minimize risk of damage by maintaining a healthy lawn. Another strategy to prevent damage, especially where insects have been a perennial problem, includes spring application of products containing imidacloprid (Merit) or halofenozide (Mach 2). Both last for several weeks in the soil, but a late summer application is sometimes necessary. If you unfortunately missed the preventative control application in the spring, a mid to late summer application of granular carbaryl or dylox can suppress white grubs and billbugs but control at this point is much more difficult. Cranberry girdler, army worms and sod web worm are easier to kill and multiple products will control them. For further information on lawn insects consult the following website <http://utahpests.usu.edu/ipm/htm/factsheets/by=category/category=149>.

If you have determined that neither drought nor insects are causing brown patches, it may be that you have a fungal disease. Conditions that make lawns more susceptible to fungal disease include; shallow irrigation, watering excessively, over fertilization, compacted soil, and excessive thatch. It is often easier to control them by correcting the original problem. If chemical control is necessary, fungicides can be expensive, and the disease should be properly diagnosed. Contact the Extension Office for assistance in diagnosing turf problems. Visit the following web site for specific information on common turf diseases in Utah: <http://utahpests.usu.edu/plantdiseases/htm/turf/turfdiseases>.