

## Lawn Care

Lawns make up an important part of our landscape, and Americans spend a lot of time and money keeping them in top shape. In fact, having a lawn is such a big part of our culture that we cultivate more turf in the United States than farmers grow cotton, rice or barley. American households also spend between \$220 and \$500 per year in maintaining their lawns.

With this in mind, we would all love to have a golf course-quality lawn, but we also live in an arid environment that is often not conducive to growing turf. Turfgrass species used locally are not totally adapted to our dry climate. We offset this somewhat with secondary irrigation, but grasses can quickly become stressed and lose vigor, green color and become more susceptible to pests. When this happens, many turn to pesticides and fertilizers as a primary option for maintaining a healthy lawn. It is better to reduce stress on the lawn by mowing regularly at a height between 2 ½ and 3 inches and watering less frequently for a longer period of time.

The frequency turf should be fertilized and the fertilizer used depends on several factors. Getting an inexpensive soil test performed can offer guidelines. Soil tests tell the amount of phosphorus and potassium needed, which, oftentimes, is little or none. Nitrogen will almost always be needed, and how frequently to fertilize with nitrogen depends on how the turf is used. Lightly used areas may only need two applications per year, whereas more heavily used turf may need up to four applications.

Another aspect of lawn care that can often be improved is frequency of watering. Most have a tendency to apply twice as much water as turf requires. This often happens because brown spots develop in the hottest part of the year and we adjust our sprinkling system to water more to correct this. It is better to water adequately for most of the lawn, then place a small hose end sprinkler on the brown spots to help them green up. Depending on the time of year, turf requires up to 2 inches of supplemental irrigation weekly. The amount of time it takes to apply this varies greatly, due to things such as the quality of the sprinkling system and water pressure. To determine how much water your system emits, visit <http://www.conservewater.utah.gov/agency/materials/guide/Default.asp>. For a factsheet on how to fertilize properly and care for your lawn, visit [http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/HG\\_517.pdf](http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/HG_517.pdf).

When lawns are properly cared for, risk of insect pest and disease invasion is minimized. Unfortunately, this does not make them immune, and most of us will eventually have pest and

disease problems. USU has a great disease and pest diagnostic lab with helpful information on controlling lawn problems. Visit <http://utahpests.usu.edu> for useful lawn pest control factsheets.