

HOME WATER SELF-CHECK: Do-it-Yourself Water Check for the Home Landscape

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In the state of Idaho, approximately two-thirds of the water consumed by homeowners is used to maintain landscapes. In recent water surveys, it was determined that a typical homeowner in Idaho applies 50 to 80 inches of water each growing season. This is more than twice as much as the grass needs. Nearly one-third of our water supply is wasted with the over-irrigation of our landscapes.

Three leading causes of over-irrigation include:

1. Irrigating more often than the plant requires.
2. Irrigation that runs off slopes or percolates beyond the root systems.
3. Poorly-designed, poorly-maintained, or inefficient irrigation systems.

When a dry spot shows up in your lawn what is the first thing you do? The correct water-saving approach would be to fix any problems with the sprinkler system that would be causing the spot. Another approach would be to water the spot by hand. Sadly, most homeowners will just increase the amount of irrigation water they apply to the entire landscape in order to correct the dry spot. Using the entire irrigation system to water the dry spot means that the rest of the landscape will be over-watered.

The Division of Water Resources conducted a survey last year that showed only about 6 percent of homeowners know how much water their irrigation systems are applying. For the other 94 percent, a recommendation to “water

deeper, less frequently” and “apply half an inch of water every 3 days” have little or no meaning. However, there is a non-mathematical, simple method to determine, for yourself, how much water you are supplying to your lawn.

1. First set out at least four containers in the yard. These containers can be any straight-sided container like a soup can or cut-off milk cartons. Tuna cans are too shallow and have a splash variable which makes the cans an inaccurate source of information. Special irrigation catch cups can usually be picked up at your local County Extension Offices. Run your sprinkler system 5 minutes if you have spray heads and 10 to 20 minutes if you have rotors. Compare the amount of water in the containers. If the containers all have about the same amount of water in them, the system is watering uniformly. If the cups show considerable variations in water level, the irrigation system is not spreading



Suitable Containers

The suggested application is one-half inch of water each irrigation.

...Easy three-step process to learn for yourself how much water you are supplying to your landscapes.



Checking contents of container.

evenly. Determine what repairs or adjustments are needed and fix the sprinkler system. Repeat this process until the measurement in each container is roughly the same.



2. In Southwestern Idaho, average high temperatures during the growing season reach 95 to 105 degrees F. The recommended application rate of water is one-half inch per irrigation. Mark a line one-half inch from the bottom of the container. Turn on the

water and observe how long it takes to fill the containers to the marks. This provides the amount of time it will take for the homeowner to apply the recommended amount of irrigation water. Three or more irrigation cycles, with an hour break in between each cycle, are also recommended when applying one-half inch of water. This program will account for different soil types and will prevent run off as well as deep percolation of irrigation water.

Example: Most time clocks have an option to make it easier to set up the cycles. The irrigation test may indicate that 21 minutes of irrigation are needed to apply one-half inches of water. Dividing 21 minutes by 3 irrigation cycles requires that three cycles of 7 minutes each should be applied with one hour of soak time in between each cycle.

3. Plants use less water in the spring and fall than in the summer and irrigation frequency should be adjusted to accommodate these differences. Following this schedule can save you as much as half of your yearly water usage. Common sense habits like turning your sprinklers off during rainstorms or adding a rain shutoff device to your system is also an important part of the equation. Following this schedule will, in an average weather year, supply as much water as your lawn needs.

Irrigation Schedule	
Month	Interval
April 31	Once every 7 days
May	Once every 4 days
June	Once every 3 days
July	Once every 3 days
August	Once every 3 days
September	Once every 6 days
October 1 to shutdown	Once every 12 days



yourself and your lawn to be consistently efficient. The results will be worth it. Remember, for every unnecessary irrigation that is eliminated you will save enough water for about 104 showers, 52 baths, 52 loads of laundry, or 312 toilet flushes.

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...It is possible to save water and have a healthy green lawn.

Water Needed for Bluegrass Lawn	
May	3.7" of water
June	4.8" of water
July	5.6" of water
August	4.7" of water
September	3.2" of water
October	1.0" of water
Total Need	23" of water per season

*Totals based on historical Eto Data in Payette County

It is possible to save water and have a healthy lawn. Take some time to train

