



From the Sidelines

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Water conservation coming to a field near you

The July 16 headline read, "California OKs \$500 fine for wasting water." The article began, "California water regulators Tuesday approved fines for washing cars, watering lawns or hosing down sidewalks after revised figures showed that residents have increased consumption despite calls for big cutbacks amid the state's severe drought. They are the **first** emergency conservation measures passed to try to force Californians to wake up to the three-year-long dry spell, the worst in decades."

Those of us who live in regions where drought is not yet considered an issue might ignore this news but my check of the US Drought Monitor, which is produced in partnership between the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the US Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, revealed that half of the 50 states have at least one area considered to be in at least short-term drought.

As a refresher, here are some points to consider to save water, courtesy of Grass Seed USA, a coalition of grass seed farmers and academics:

- Avoid overwatering: Many overwater their turf, which not only wastes water but harms the grass in the long run. A simple trick to determine whether your turf needs watering is to stick a screwdriver into the ground. If it enters the soil easily, your lawn has plenty of water already. If you have trouble getting the screwdriver into the ground, it's time to give the grass a drink.

- Adjust Watering to Temp: Suggest 0.2 to 0.25 inch of water 2 to 4 times a week starting in the early summer as the rain ends. During peak heat and drought stress irrigate 6 times per week at 0.25 inches per event. When considering

the fact that turf is a shallow rooted plant and to prevent leaching and ruff of nutrients, pesticides and water, irrigation rates should not exceed 0.25 inches.

- Water during the cooler hours for best results: Always water your turf during the cooler hours of the day. Early morning and evening are the ideal times to water. Cooler air and less wind mean water is absorbed directly into the grass, with less moisture lost to evaporation. Watering during the heat of the day can actually scald and burn grass.

- Save water by selecting a large, low drop sprinkler setting. Air currents can easily catch a light spray and keep the water from reaching your grass. To avoid this, adjust your sprinkler setting for larger drops closer to the ground rather than misting in the air. You'll end up with a more thorough watering while saving water and money.

- Keep your grass a little taller in the summer. You can also reduce the amount of water lost to evaporation by keeping your grass slightly taller in the summer, so that the blades shade the roots and soil surface.

- Create a routine and stick to it. Whatever watering routine you choose, try to stick with it. Grass does best with a consistent watering schedule, and starting and stopping a watering pattern can stunt your turf's growth. This is especially true right after fertilization.

Clarification

In our July issue on page 36 we published an article highlighting the 100th anniversary of The Toro Company. We should have alerted readers upfront that the article was written by a public relations agency that works for Toro. We regret not doing so. ■

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