

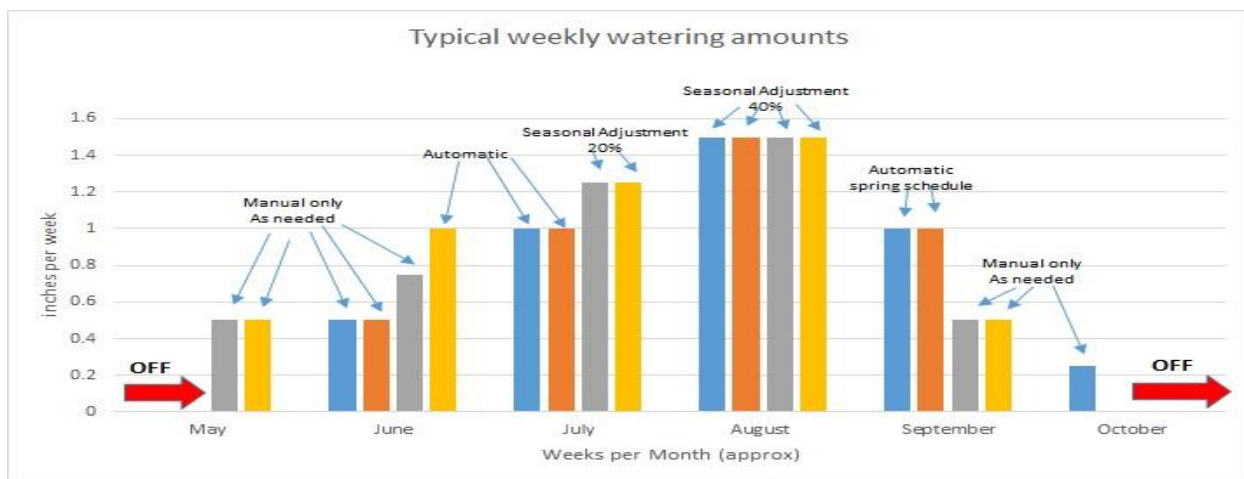
## Turf Facts / Let Your Turf Go Dormant

In the world of lawn grasses there are many often repeated management methodologies. While some may be based upon research and best management strategies, many are based less on fact and more on convenience or tradition. Here is some information to help you weed through the brush to get to the root of what your lawn actually needs based upon how it lives.

**Turf types:** While there exists a host of different varieties or species of lawn grasses, they are all generally lumped into two groups based upon their response to temperature: Warm season varieties and cool season varieties. In our neck of the woods, it is typically cool season varieties that are planted here.

**Cool season:** As the name suggests, our lawns do not like heat. Cool season grasses thrive when the outside temperature is between 60 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit (F) and the ground temperature is between 50 and 65 degrees F. Once extreme temperatures and dry periods hit, two things begin to happen: The blades (leaves) begin to lose their ability to transpire (move) water onto their surfaces and the roots (that pull the water into the plant) begin to function less efficiently. Basically the plant is trying to go dormant, to hibernate if you will. It does not function well in high heat, it wants a mid-summer siesta. The grass is not dying as some folks would believe.

**Adding water:** With a few variables based on exposure to the sun, wind and a high amount of heat reflective and retaining hardscape surrounding it (asphalt, concrete, bricks etc.), turf will do well on 1" to 1 1/2" of water weekly from typically mid-June through mid- September. It will do well with water being applied about three times a week. Using this method of scheduling will ensure your yard is healthy, the grass never goes completely dormant and you'll lower your water usage. (Use the example in the June 2018 issue to help determine what your individual area(s) may need) Your schedule should look something like this:



**Fertilization: Do a soil test!** Without knowing what is currently in the soil, you can't possibly know what is needed or how much you may need. Excessive fertilizer applications are known to cause huge problems in the environment; Alge blooms, excessive marine plant growth, and

oxygen depletion in our water ways to name a few. And lets not forget nitrous oxide, one of the big three green house gasses behind carbon dioxide and methane. Fertilizing in the summer is not the best time, cool season turf likes to be fertilized in the fall and early spring.

**Mowing:** maintane a turf height of 2-3 inches in the spring and fall, 4 inches in the summer. Never cut more than  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the blade per cutting and make sure your mower blades are sharp. It takes energy for the grass to repair damage, and that kind of energy is not easy for cool season turf grass to maintain during the summer.

**Aeration & thatching:** Never aerate in the summer, only in the spring and fall. The purpose of aerating is to loosen the soil and allow air and water to permeate the soil to promote root growth. A good idea is to get some  $\frac{1}{4}$ -10 minus gravel, gardening pumice or bio-char (<http://nwbiochar.org/>) and rake it into the holes. Don't worry about a thin layer on top as this will easily be encorporated into the turf.

**Excessive thatch:** Thatch is not grass clippings, it is a layer of roots, stems and stolons on the surface of the soil. A depth of thatch more than  $\frac{1}{2}$ " is detrimental. Thatch is by and large hydrophobic (resists water) and will inhibit water and nutrient infiltration in to the soil. (think thatched roof)

**Weed Control:**

Some weeds thrive during reduced water situations because of large tap roots that can reach and hold water. A broadcast application of herbicide can further stress the dormant turfgrass. Instead, spot treat these weeds with an herbicide or remove the weeds by hand.

In mid September the season begins to turn to fall, the sun is lower in the sky, the nights begin to get longer and cooler, dew develops on the lawn and the rain returns. It doesn't take very long for a dormant lawn to spring back to life in the fall.