

Several of us (your neighbors and fellow Homeowners) drove around the neighborhood one weekend in September. We found that many of the lawns in our neighborhood were brown or dead. We believe some neighbors have become accustomed to the idea that this is unavoidable in the Texas summer. However, many lawns have been kept green and thick, so this is clearly possible.

We have since put together a list of tips and referrals from various neighbors, plus information on watering restrictions and exemptions. We hope this will prove helpful to our neighbors. The section about keeping lawns healthy in the summer heat amounts to coulda/shoulda at this time of year. Of course, we will send these again in six months, at the start of the growing season, and a few months later at the start of the summer, as appropriate. The suggestions about **seeding Fescue grass, winterizing your lawn, pre-emergent weed prevention, and protecting new sod before an expected freeze** are at present the **most timely** contained herein. Also according to some professionals, this is still a great time to plant sod (as well as trees and shrubs). The rest is included for those interested in planning for the spring and summer seasons.

Below are some stock messages about planting new sod, watering, and water restrictions. These include some reminders about keeping your lawn healthy and about following water restrictions. (These are not incompatible -- we can do both!) First is a section about planting sod and trimming trees. Then there are some vendor referrals. Next is a section about watering daily (with a variance from the City if necessary), followed by a section with details of Richardson City Stage Three Water Restrictions. Finally there are sections with other important tips for keeping lawns healthy, especially in the hot Texas summer.

The following messages provide some practical advice and suggestions:

- Advice for planting new sod
- Vendor referrals
- Tips and exemptions for watering daily
- Stage 3 Water Restrictions
- Other tips for healthy lawns
- Keeping your lawn healthy in the summer

**These tips are not "from the HOA". The Association cannot tell Homeowners what to plant or how to landscape. These are merely tips collected and passed on from other Homeowners and from some professional vendors. The HOA is not responsible for these opinions, and the author is not an expert on these topics. (I have not tried many of these tips myself.) So seek advice from your professional landscaper or nursery.**

Furthermore, these tips focus on lawn care and watering. It is not required that a property have a lawn. There are other types of ground cover. Arid landscaping can be executed with native grasses, with desert plants, and without plants. These tips just focus on some types of grass that many Homeowners currently have. (These grasses tend to require a lot of water.) This is not intended to suggest that these are what should be planted or what will be commonly seen in the future. This is just what many of us currently do, what we know a little about, and what we chose to look into.

See <http://www.sherrillpark.com/Landscaping.html> for further information about these topics and about other types of landscaping -- water-wise, native grasses, other kinds of ground cover, etc. See <http://www.sodsolutions.com/> for more information about types of sod.

Every property has slightly different needs and circumstances. If a lawn is frequently walked on, or if children and pets often play on it, then it may require more and different from a lawn that is rarely stepped upon. Some yards have different soil qualities and are in different positions with respect to drainage. The following tips are general and do not take into account such conditions. **Consult a professional landscaper for best advice for your own situation.**

## ==--== Planting New Sod or Seed

If you plant a new lawn:

- If your lawn is **sunlit** with little shade, then **Bermuda** grass may be used, and **St. Augustine** may also grow well.
- If your yard has **lots of shade**, then **St. Augustine** or **Zoysia** grass are very hardy. They thrive in shade and in heat better than most other species.
- **Palmetto St. Augustine** is a superior variety that requires less water and handles dryness, shade and freezes even better than "regular" St Augustine.
- Sod can be planted in the autumn or in the very early spring (February). In the late autumn, the grass will become dormant and may turn brown, but the roots will continue to grow. In the early spring, there is still time for the sod to become firmly rooted in the moist, cool ground before the weather becomes dry and hot.
- **Fescue** is also a good choice for **heavy shade**, but it must be planted as seed in the autumn or winter. (Unlike Bermuda and St. Augustine, Fescue may not survive much sunlight in the summer, but it may live in shade and then stay green for most of the winter.) Be sure to clear and turn or aerate the soil before planting seed; then cover lightly with soil, mulch, peat moss or compost.

- Make sure you (or your landscaper) first turn the soil with a tiller where you will lay sod. (Make sure to flag and avoid damaging sprinkler heads. A professional landscaper will always do this.)
- Some landscapers skip this or only snip off the grass without aerating the soil; this will make it much more difficult for your new sod to root properly.
- The sod patches should be laid so that they fit snugly together or push up slightly against each other. Optionally, a heavy roller tools may be employed to press the patches down -- this will press the sod mesh together at the patch edges, so that it forms a continuous lawn surface. (This will make it look very nice from the start; otherwise, it may look like a patchwork for a few weeks. Sometimes a landscaper will press the lawn down in order to see the contours clearly.)
- **Most sod in Texas is pre-fertilized** -- the sod farms usually fertilize within a couple of months of harvesting. **Ask your vendor or landscaper** if the sod you purchase is pre-fertilized or if you should add fertilizer.
- If you plant seed, then it may help to apply a root stimulator about a week after planting. Apply fertilizer several weeks after planting (a few weeks after it sprouts). Seek advice from your professional nursery or vendor.
- **If part of your lawn is heavily shaded throughout the day, then you may need to have your tree(s) trimmed** (branches thinned out or lifted by cutting off lower limbs) in order to allow more sunlight. This may also improve the health of your trees. **Consult and/or employ a professional arborist.**
- **Water consistently for ten minutes twice a day for the first two to three weeks** (except when it rains). **See watering tips** and exemptions for Stage Three water restrictions, below.
- In winter, if a light freeze is expected, then water lightly a few hours before the freeze. Freezing dry roots can kill grass, but moisture in the soil can protect the roots from freezing.

Notes on Palmetto:

Palmetto St. Augustine is the most sold patented turfgrass in the world with more than 1 Billion square feet sold. Selected for better color and finer texture. Palmetto demonstrates superior shade, cold, frost, heat and drought tolerance. This versatile turfgrass is used across the southern United States from the Carolinas to California under a wide range of climate and soil conditions making it the ideal choice for residential and commercial use. Palmetto St. Augustine is a proven versatile grass that is a standard in many regions.

-- Source: <http://www.sodsolutions.com/palmetto>

We had problems keeping regular St. Augustine under trees and in drought. Jan at Calloway's recommended Palmetto St. Augustine, and we went with it. No problems

anymore. It is slightly more expensive, and it must be special ordered; but we have not had to re-sod at all for 4 years now, where before I was spot sodding every year and still unable to keep grass under our red oaks. It handles freezes better and requires less water. Your installer can order at Servall on 14th St. between Jupiter and Ave K.

-- Source: Steve Hull from Crowley Park on Nextdoor.com

## ==-= Referrals

Here is a vendor that other Homeowners have used for laying down sod, and they said he does a good job: **Andy's Lawn Service** [972-588-8850](tel:972-588-8850) (Andrew Friermood). The Homeowner at 2104 Bluebonnet said, "We would definitely use them again, and recommend them to anyone who asks. They were priced averagely for the relatively high price sodding a lawn costs." Others who saw this lawn found it to be a relatively good job of sodding.

Another vendor is **Oneal Landscaping** [214-422-5668](tel:214-422-5668) "Showed up when agreed, completed the same day, charged the agreed amount."

Tommy **Sessums** Lawnsaping [214-215-2867](tel:214-215-2867) "Installed Empire Zoysia. Looks great!"

If bare spots on the lawn are related to excess shade, then it may also be necessary to have your tree(s) trimmed (lifted or branches thinned out) to let in more sunlight. This may also be good for your trees. Several Homeowners have commented favorably on good service they received from this arborist: **Jim Breaux, Personal Touch Tree Service** <http://www.personaltouchtreeservice.com/> [214-328-7213](tel:214-328-7213).

To purchase any of the sod varieties listed, several neighbors have recommended **A-1 Grass** at 1320 14th St, Plano 75074 (at N street) <http://www.a1grass.com/> [972-423-8814](tel:972-423-8814).

To purchase Fescue and other grass seed (as well as a variety of mulch, compost, fertilizer, organic gardening supplies, and vegetable and herb plants), some neighbors have recommended **Wells Brothers** Lawn & Garden supply at 5001 Ave K, Plano 75074 (north of Parker, just south of Sam's) <http://www.wbfarmstore.net/> [972-424-8516](tel:972-424-8516).

To purchase a variety of seed, sod and garden supplies, several neighbors recommend **Calloway's Nursery** at 2100 North Plano Rd, Richardson

75082 <http://www.calloways.com/richardson/972-644-0144>. "Calloway's Premium Lawn Fertilizer is the best fertilizer I ever used." "Great advice about plant selection and care."

**(The Association does not recommend any particular vendor and is not responsible for the services of vendors or for the opinions expressed by individual Homeowners.)**

## ==--== Watering Daily and Exemptions from Water Restrictions

Here is some information about watering new sod and other new plantings. **See also the section above about planting sod and the section below about watering restrictions.**

Stage Three Water Restrictions limit Residents to watering one day per week on a specified day in the summer (and only two days per month in the winter), except that **watering more often is permitted with the following exemptions:**

- New landscaping, new plantings, **new sod**, and foundation slabs can be watered for up to two hours **as needed** (except when raining), with a variance from the City of Richardson, using any method (such as a sprinkler system):
  - - **The City will issue you a variance on request** to water your new landscaping, trees, bushes or sod for up to two hours a day with your sprinkler system for up to 30 days.
    - If your sod is not completely rooted after thirty days, then you can request an extension to this variance; **the City may issue an extension on request for another 30 days.**
    - If you forget to request a variance and are issued a warning or a citation from Code Enforcement for watering new sod in violation of Stage Three restrictions, then you can still ask the City to issue a variance and also vacate the warning or citation.
    - If Code Enforcement sees that you have new sod or seeded grass, they may actually take care of this for you -- the City tends to be helpful when you are learning the rules, trying to maintain and beautify your property, and generally being a good citizen. It is nice that they may do this for us; but be a good citizen and call in for your variance, to save them (and you) the time to come out to check a violation when it should not be necessary.
- The following watering methods can be used for lawns and landscaping without a variance:

- Smart irrigation system.
- Drip irrigation system.
- Soaker hoses.
- (Hand watering is permitted for flower beds, but not for lawns.)
- Stage Three Restrictions allow you to wash your vehicles, hose down your driveway, and keep your swimming pool, spa, etc. filled.

(If you see someone watering at the wrong times and want to report a violation, then you need not worry about whether they have a variance. City Code Enforcement always checks for variances before they do anything else on a violation report -- this is their job, not ours.)

The HOA does not report or issue citations for unlawful watering. In general, City Code Enforcement is concerned with water conservation, safety and health issues, severe neglect, public rights-of-way (streets and alleys) and city ordinances. The Association is concerned with property upkeep (maintenance and beautification) where visible from streets and common areas. These different rules fit nicely together and both the City and the HOA will each help Homeowners and Residents meet all these various obligations.

### ==--== Watering Restrictions (Stage 3)

Some of our neighbors may not have gotten the news about City of Richardson Stage 3 Water Restrictions (effective June 1, 2013).

This neighborly reminder may help to avoid a fine from the City of Richardson, which is serious about enforcing water restrictions!

The HOA web site ([www.sherrillpark.com](http://www.sherrillpark.com)) has full information on the current (winter) water restrictions. The gist is:

- If the last digit of your address is even (0,2,4,6,8), then you may water on the first and third Saturdays of the month at any time of day.
- If the last digit of your address is odd (1,3,5,7,9), then you may water on the first and third Sundays of the month at any time of day.
- (In the summer, this has been every weekend instead of every other weekend, but only before 10 AM and after 6 PM; this will be evaluated again on 31st March 2014. Restrictions change for the autumn and winter -- the wet season, because less watering is needed and there is less evaporation during the middle of the day.)

- Never water when it is raining, and make sure your watering is confined to your yard (lawn and landscaped areas) and does not run off in any substantial amount down the alley or street.
- Watch for and repair immediately any broken sprinkler heads and leaks in your irrigation lines. (Leaks may show up as soggy spots or pools on your lawn.)

The HOA web site has also started a new section addressing water conservation tips; there are also some short evening courses at Texas A&M Dallas. For example, try this tip: If you have an automatic timer for your sprinkler system, then employ forty-minute rotating watering cycle times to water for ten minutes followed by a half hour to allow absorption:

- Set each cycle to water for **10 minutes** in each station/zone;
- **Wait at least 30 minutes** in each zone, to allow absorption and avert excess runoff;
- **Repeat** two or three times, depending on whether you wish twenty or thirty minutes total watering time.
- In summary, **never water** any spot **more than ten minutes** in a forty minute period; **see the section on watering tips** for more details.

Use the link to the City of Richardson web site to learn more about fines and court and how to report watering violations and waste. For exemptions from Stage 3 Restrictions, see the City web site and/or above.

## ==--== Other Tips for Healthy Lawns

Killing weeds:

- You can apply a pre-emergent in the autumn to kill weed **seeds** and **prevent** them from sprouting in the spring. (Do not do this if you plant grass or other seed that you want to grow.) This will not do anything about existing weed plants.
- You can use a broad leaf weed killer to kill weeds on a healthy lawn, and you can also use a crabgrass killer.
- It is not highly recommended to use general weed killers (such as roundup) to kill existing weed plants on a lawn, because these can also harm your grass.
- Weeds can be pulled out or turned under.
  - There will usually be few weeds on a healthy lawn, because the grass (especially St Augustine) will tend to choke them out -- so these can be pulled out or killed by spot applications.

- If a lawn is very sparse and weak (allowing weeds to grow freely), then the solution may be to turn it under and plant a new lawn (or install other ground cover) -- tilling/turning the yard should destroy any weeds.

#### Fertilizer:

- In early autumn (from mid-September to early October), spreading a "winterizer" is an option that may help your lawn keep well until the spring. It is especially important to do this if the lawn is thin/weak/sparse.
- It is highly recommended to apply a light to moderate fertilizer regime every year in the very early spring. (Several neighbors recommend one from Calloway's -- see the referrals section.)

#### Aeration and Compost:

If the soil is hard, then it should be aerated to help the grass grow (especially if the grass is thin/weak/sparse. Most lawns should be aerated at least every few years. Many neighbors use a professional landscaper, who has the equipment to do this. However, it can also be rented at stores like Home Depot.

(A lawn must be aerated before planting seeds or sod. A landscaper may turn the soil with a tiller to accomplish this and to turn weeds under when planting a new lawn. You can also do this with rented equipment. If there is little to no grass or weeds, then simply raking deeply and vigorously with a metal-tooth rake -- a garden rake, not a leaf rake -- may be sufficient.)

If your soil appears hard and compact, especially if the grass is thin and weak, then aerate the lawn to loosen it up and optionally apply a half inch of compost (spread evenly over the lawn while the aeration holes are still open). It may also help to add compost just after the lawn starts growing in the spring and before it goes dormant in autumn.

**Contact your professional nursery or landscaper regarding advice on the best method to kill weeds without killing grass, when to apply fertilizer, and which fertilizers are best for your lawn.**

## ==--== Keeping Your Lawn Healthy in the Texas Summer

There are several factors for keeping your lawn healthy during the summer heat:

- **The number one factor is watering consistently and more than once at the times allowed** under current water restrictions. For best results, water morning and evening (and possibly also at midnight) on the one day (Saturday or



Sunday) permitted each week in the summer, in order to keep a lawn healthy for the rest of the week.

- (In the winter, you can only water two days per month. It may not be necessary to water at all during the winter, if there is sufficient rain.)
- (Do not over-water. Make sure the lawn is not saturated and that water does not run off onto pavement -- this would be wasteful, and this runoff carries fertilizers, pesticides, pet waste and our topsoil into our streams and lakes.)
- If you want to water for twenty or thirty minutes, then it is highly recommended to instead use two or three **forty-minute cycles -- ten minutes of watering followed by thirty minutes off**, for the water to soak in. (See **below** and also under watering restrictions, for a more detailed explanation and for other tips about how to water judiciously.)
- Stated another way: For each area (each station or zone when using a sprinkler system), **water no more than ten minutes at a time**. You can water again in the same area/station/zone after waiting at least thirty minutes to allow the water to soak in.
- In north central Texas, we have heavy clay soils that become compacted; such soil cannot absorb water as quickly as most sprinkler systems apply it.
  - This causes two problems when water is applied incorrectly:
    - Runoff water, which is wasted and is harmful (as described above).
    - This leaves little water in the soil -- it is absorbed only into the very top layer. Grass roots will tend to grow very shallow if that is where they find water.
  - However, if water is allowed to soak in and then administered again (preferably in several short repetitions, separated by at least half an hour), then it will gradually sink deeper into the soil:
    - As the water in the top layer is consumed and evaporates, the grass roots will tend to grow downwards (along the increasing moisture gradient) seeking more water. Strongly-rooted grass is generally more healthy and will provide a thicker, more luxurious lawn.
    - Water further below the surface will not evaporate and will continue to be available for the grass to drink, instead of being wasted as runoff.
- Many lawns have problems with grass growing under heavy shade. Dry heat plus lack of sunlight is deadly for many types of grass. **Lifting (cutting off the lower limbs) and/or thinning of heavy shade trees to allow sunlight is important to prevent large bare spots** on the lawn under the trees. (This also keeps the trees healthy.) This is not the same as topping trees. (Topping is often unhealthy for trees. This differs, depending on the type of tree, but may

be damaging to many varieties.) **Obtain advice and services from a professional arborist.**

- It is recommended that many grasses (especially St. Augustine) be **mowed** no shorter than **2.5 to 3 inches** in the summer. This is the recommended setting for your lawn mower or for your lawn service to use.
  - For Bermuda grass, the recommended setting is shorter -- about 1.5 to 2 inches; nurseries have suggested that letting Bermuda grow longer is not healthy.
- Some properties have pine trees and lawns smothered in pine needles. It has been suggested that this can be improved by either:
  - removing the fallen pine needles,
  - planting flower beds under these trees so the needles will serve as mulch, or
  - installing rings or borders of rock, brick or metal around the trees to keep the needles in a separate mulch bed under the trees (instead of spreading over the lawn).
- St. Augustine grass is very hardy. It is often successful in the Texas heat, especially in shade; it requires a lot of water, especially in sunlight.
  - **Palmetto St. Augustine** is a superior variety that requires less water and handles dryness, shade and freezes even better than "regular" (Raleigh) St Augustine.
  - **Zoysia** is another variety that handles drought, heat, cold, shade and full sun relatively well.
  - **Bermuda** is common in our neighborhood. It does well in sunlight (with little to no shade), if it is watered well.
  - **Fescue** does very well in shade and stays green most of the winter; it requires shade and will not do well in the summer under sunlight.
  - Fescue can be planted as seed in the autumn; the other grasses listed above are usually planted as sod in the autumn or spring.
- Please remember that Homeowners are responsible for their lawn in the "parkway" (easement) between the sidewalk and curb along the property; please maintain this along with the rest of your lawn.

Every year, some Homeowners lose their lawns over the summer and then need to replant them. In such circumstances, there may be little left in those yards to grow when temperatures cool down and we get more rain. It is sometimes necessary to plant sod at substantial expense; this should not be necessary if we water regularly as permitted. (Other types of ground cover may be an option for those who must replace their lawns.)

Therefore, **failing to water your grass consistently when permitted can be costly**. If you have a brown lawn that is not yet dead, and if you do not bring it back to a healthy condition before mid-November, then the root system may be too weak to last the winter. Bringing back a brown lawn may require a several weeks of consistent watering.

Lawns can also be killed by grub worms (white grubs). Some species of Junebugs (June beetles) lay larvae in the grass, which eat the roots. Damage to lawns from grub worms tend to be worse near street lights, which attract the Junebugs. If you have a dead lawn with brown, dry grass, try kicking or lifting the clumps or rolling up the grass like a carpet -- if the grass is loose and easily moved, then you may have grub worms; but if the grass is still tightly bound to the soil and difficult to move, then the problem may be lack of water. The following link has more information about identifying and treating grub worm infestation:

<https://insects.tamu.edu/extension/publications/html/e211.html>.

## ==--== Practical Advice

How much to water depends on the time of year, temperature and rainfall, as we might expect.

- When the days are hot, then it is important to water consistently. (**See tips on watering.**)
- When temperatures are cool, then it is not necessary to water as frequently (but still important to water when there is little to no rain).
- When it rains frequently, then watering is not necessary.

**Many of us have found that watering appropriately on the one day allowed each week in summer will keep an established lawn (with appropriate type of grass) green for the rest of the week. Watering flower beds with soaker hoses once or twice during the week will also help the surrounding lawn make it to the next sprinkler day. (In winter, we are only allowed to water on two days each month, but there is usually sufficient rain that even this much is not necessary.)**

**If you do not water and let your lawn get brown, then it may take a long time (and perhaps some expense) to bring it back.**