

Water Conservation on the Lawn and Elsewhere

Changing your lawn maintenance habits can go a long way to reducing your outdoor water use.

Lawn Watering

- Water in the morning. To avoid water loss to evaporation, water during three hours before to three hours after sunrise.
- Water deeply once or twice a week, instead of shallowly and every day. This will encourage roots to grow deeper into the soil to find water.
- Water when the wind is calm.
- Adhere to watering restrictions; they are in place for a reason!

Irrigation System - Installation

- Be sure a certified irrigation technician installs your system. Search [here](#) for a Level 2 Certified Technician in the Okanagan.
- Although it initially costs more, have your irrigation installer use good quality fittings.
- Enquire about parts and installation warranty.
- Use sprinklers that spray water droplets; avoid misting heads as they are more vulnerable to evaporation and wind.
- Use a controller with: a) six or more zones, b) a rain day button, c) two or three different start times, d) days of the week option.
- Be sure the irrigation technician writes the zones and settings into your irrigation instruction manual. Leave it near the controller for quick reference.
- Ensure the irrigation technician shows you how to schedule and/or adjust the controller.

Irrigation System - Maintenance

- Adjust your controller as required during the growing season. Your lawn requires less water in the spring and fall than during the peak season (July/August).
- Use the rain day setting on your controller or have a rain/moisture sensor on your system.
- Have your irrigation system blown out in the fall to avoid damage caused by water freezing in the pipes over the winter.
- Perform spring maintenance. Ensure all sprayers and emitters are working properly.
- Use the tuna can method (see below) to assess the coverage of your lawn sprinklers.

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Lawn Maintenance

- 'Good' soil – one that is at least 3-4" deep and contains a good level of humus or organic material to retain moisture and provides root access to oxygen and nutrients – is the key to a healthy lawn.
- Once your lawn is established, practice grasscycling: leave grass clippings on your lawn. They decompose quickly to recycle organic matter and nutrients back into the soil to feed the lawn.
- Set your mower blades to cut the grass to a height of 3".
- Mow regularly to avoid removing more than 1/3 of the blades each time. This reduces stress on the lawn ... and makes your job a lot easier too.
- Avoid using chemical fertilizers. They make your lawn grow faster which means it will need more water and more mowing. Chemical fertilizers also cause beneficial soil microorganisms to die, leaving your lawn dependent on regular doses of chemical fertilizers. A high percentage of the fertilizer ends up leaching into groundwater and then into our drinking water.
- Work towards getting your lawn 'off drugs' by using compost or organic matter to improve the soil and lessen the need for synthetic fertilizers. If you 'inherited' lawn that was laid on poor soil, be sure to aerate when the lawn is growing actively (early fall or late spring). Topdress with a good quality compost to slowly bring the lawn back to a naturally healthy state.
- Allow your lawn to go dormant in the summer. It will reawaken as the cooler, moister fall weather approaches.
- Mow the lawn when it is relatively dry.
- Keep the blades of your mower sharpened to avoid stress to the lawn.
- You can further reduce your footprint by using an electric mower. One hour running a gas mower is equivalent to the pollution of driving a car 800 km. A push mower is even better – good exercise and, your neighbours will likely appreciate the quiet too!
- It is best to eliminate the use of pesticides and herbicides on your lawn. They are harmful to pets and humans, especially children. They also leach into the groundwater and ultimately contaminate our drinking water. A healthy lawn quite ably competes with non-beneficial insects, pests, and weeds.

Other Ways to Reduce Outdoor Water Use

- Use the [Landscape Assessment Tool](#) and accompanying Fact Sheets.
- Adjust sprayers to eliminate watering hardscape such as patios, driveways, sidewalks, roads, etc.
- Sweep your path and driveway – no need to use water.
- Commercial car washes often recycle water. Use these businesses to wash your vehicle or drive it onto your lawn to recycle your water. Use a 'green' soap, if any at all.
- Eliminate narrow strips of lawn and steeply sloped grassed areas. They are difficult to water efficiently and mowing a sloped area can be hazardous.
- Use rain barrels to capture water from your roof. Click [here](#) for more on harvesting

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rainwater.

- Convert to drip irrigation wherever possible. It is much more efficient for everything except the lawn. In-line grid systems are the best. An existing underground system is readily adaptable.
- Read the City of Kelowna's [Landscape and Irrigation Guide to Water Efficiency](#).

Re-Using your Tuna Can

Lawns need about about 1 inch of water per week -- 1½ inch when it is very hot. Place empty tuna cans or measuring cups around the yard (all within range of the sprinkler, some close, some farther away). Turn on the sprinkler for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, measure the amount of water collected in each can. Check to see if there was even distribution of water in all the cans/cups. If the cans/cups collected 1 inch of water, then you know you need to water for 30 minutes. If the cans collected more or less than 1 inch of water, then calculate approximately how long you need to water your lawn so it receives 1 inch of water in each watering session.