

## Maintenance Q&A

Editor's note: Boiler info

### Keep Your Community Turf Areas in Top Shape

#### **Question: Can proper mowing help a community conserve water use on its turf areas?**

**Answer:** Yes. Avoid mowing too closely, since grass that is too short uses more water. Adjust mowers so the grass height is within the following ranges:

- Hybrid Bermuda: ½ to 1 inches
- Common Bermuda: 1 ½ to 2 inches

Your community's mowing schedule also is important. During the peak growing season, which in Arizona are the months of May through September, cut grass ½ inch in height every two to three days. Mow common Bermuda grass 1 ½ inches in height every five to seven days.

Communities also should consider these additional mowing tips:

- Don't remove more than one-third of the grass at a time.
- Keep mower blades sharp.
- If your community mows frequently, it does not need to bag clippings.
- Avoid following the same pattern each time you mow.
- Increase the mowing height by 25 percent in shady areas.

#### **Q: Is fertilizer important for turf areas? When is the best time to apply it?**

**A:** Regular fertilizing is essential for proper growth and good color during the growing season. However, an over-fertilized lawn will require more water and more frequent mowing. Do not fertilize more frequently than once a month, and follow the manufacturer's directions.

The best time to apply fertilizer is in the evening or early morning. Make sure to water the lawn thoroughly after fertilizing it. Additionally, consider applying ferrous sulfate or iron chelates. This will keep grass green without promoting excess growth.

#### **Q: How much water should turf areas receive and how often? When is the best time to water?**

**A:** The key to watering is to apply no more than necessary and to water deeply. Only water often enough to avoid wilt between waterings. During the hot summer months, water lawns no more than every three days. A lawn watering guide is available online at <http://ag.arizona.edu/AZMET/phxturf.html>. Communities also can usually find lawn-watering information in their local newspaper.

Remember to water deeply. Water long enough to move water to a depth of 8 to 10 inches into the soil. Use a probe to check the depth.

The best time to water is during the cool morning hours before 5 a.m. This helps minimize evaporation.

Here are some additional watering tips to consider:

- If water runs off the turf, irrigate more often for shorter periods of time.
- Adjust sprinkler heads so they don't spray walls, driveways or sidewalks.
- Immediately replace broken and missing sprinklers.
- Water shaded areas about 30 percent less than sunny areas.
- If it has rained, reduce irrigations accordingly.

**Q: Does aerating help grass?**

**A:** Yes. Aerating your soil will help relieve hard, compacted soils that cause puddling or runoff and inhibit root growth. The best time to aerate Bermuda grass is in May or June, when the grass is growing quickly. Consider a manual spot aeration in high traffic areas.

**Q: What is thatch?**

**A:** Thatch is a mat of plant material consisting mainly of grass stems and roots. Excessive thatch usually occurs when a property over-waters or over-fertilizes its turf areas. Remove thatch that is over one-half inch in height. Dethatch during the hot summer months so Bermuda grass can quickly recover.

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