



How to Train Your Lawn

Summer is approaching fast and that means your landscape water needs are going to increase. One way to make sure your lawn is prepared for the scorching temperatures is to 'train' the roots to grow deep.

Grass roots grow where the soil is moist. If you water your lawn every day, water only moistens the top few inches of soil encouraging shallow roots. By changing your watering schedule a bit you can train your lawn to establish deeper roots that will help it survive the brutal summer heat and hot, drying winds. Watering deeply (to at least 6 inches) allows the moisture to remain in the root zone longer which means you don't need to water as often. Irrigating your lawn two to three times a week in summer is all that's needed.

To tell when your grass needs water do the 'walk test'. Walk on the grass and then look and see if your footprints remain a few minutes later. If so, it's time to water.



Water at Night

Make sure you only water when the sun is down or during the cool morning hours to reduce evaporation losses. Many irrigation experts feel the best time to water is between sunset and 6 a.m. because evaporation is kept to a minimum.

Repair All Leaks

Check your automatic irrigation system for leaks. Leaks in your irrigation system may not be noticeable unless your system is running. Turn your controller on manually and walk your property looking for broken sprinkler heads, missing emitters (which will produce small streams of water) or breaks in irrigation piping or tubing. Details on finding irrigation leaks can be found in the [Smart Home Water Guide](#).

Fertilizing

Lush lawns look great, but heavily fertilized lawns use more water and are more susceptible to heat stress. Products with nitrogen will generate stem and blade growth which may lead to more frequent mowing. To green up a lawn without excessive growth try slow release fertilizers or those with water soluble (chelated) iron.

Mowing

Remove only one third of the grass length at each mowing as cutting too much at once stresses the grass. Mow tall to increase shading of the soil and reduce soil water loss from evaporation. Leave the clippings on the lawn. "Grasscycling" provides free fertilizer (at least ¼ of your lawn's needs), helps lawns grow greener and denser, and doesn't cause thatch buildup. You can grasscycle with your existing mower. For best results, keep the blade sharp, mow when the grass is dry, and mow a little more often. Clippings left scattered on the surface will break down quickly - if there are clumps mow again to break them up.

Dethatching

A tightly intermingled layer of dead and living stems, roots and leaves called thatch, can accumulate between the green vegetation and the soil causing grass roots to accumulate there where they can quickly dry out requiring you to water more often. A thin layer is okay, but too much will actually repel water. Excessive thatch is usually caused by over fertilizing or over watering, especially if you have a hybrid Bermuda lawn. Check your lawn by digging a pie shaped wedge of grass and soil. If the thatch layer exceeds ½ inch, it's time to dethatch your lawn.

Dethatch during the summer months so your Bermuda grass can recover quickly (not before overseeding). You can rent a vertical cutting mower or power rake or hire a professional lawn care company to do this. Remove clippings and thatch debris immediately after dethatching.

Using proper soil preparation and lawn maintenance practices will help to build healthy soil and vigorous, deep-rooted lawns. These lawns are more resistant to disease, tolerate some insect and drought damage, and will out-compete many weeds.

More information can be found in [Desert Lawn Care](#) or by contacting the Chandler Water Conservation office at conserve@chandleraz.gov, www.chandleraz.gov/water