

When the grass isn't always greener

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Extremely hot, dry summers wreak havoc on lawns, Peter Landschoot, professor of turfgrass management at Penn State.

Worries about Pennsylvania facing a severe drought seem to have faded with recent rainstorms, but the question of how to care for your lawn during this summer's heat is still important.

When it comes to maintaining your [lawn](#), according to an expert in Penn State's College of [Agricultural Sciences](#), doing less really may be doing more.

"Most years, you don't need to water if your lawn is in decent shape going into the summer season," said Peter Landschoot, professor of turfgrass management. "The spring recipe for lawn care is to fertilize, mow up to twice a week and treat for [weeds](#). But homeowners should back off on all those practices during the summer."

During the hottest, driest months of the year, it is common for cool-season grasses to go into a semidormant state and turn brown and dry. This especially may occur during a drought.

Fortunately, he explains, lawns generally recover when cool temperatures and moisture return in autumn.

He also encourages homeowners to question whether the benefits of watering their lawns are worth the cost of using valuable [water resources](#), particularly during a [drought](#), and advises homeowners to check local watering restrictions that may be in place to limit residential [water usage](#).

If you choose to continue watering throughout the summer months, Landschoot suggests doing so in the morning, when cooler temperatures and still conditions reduce water-loss due to [evaporation](#). When it comes to watering, he explains that a good rule of thumb is to water deeply and infrequently.

"Aim to moisten the ground as deep as the roots extend into the soil," said Landschoot.

In the case of [pest control](#), he cautions that treatments should be applied during the summer only if there is a significant problem.

"Grubs are active from mid-August to early October and really can damage some lawns," Landschoot said, noting that most lawns don't need annual grub treatments.

"Grubs are easy to recognize because they eat roots. If you can roll back small areas of turf like a rug, it is likely caused by grubs."

Landschoot explained that when mowing your lawn this summer, grass heights should be left a bit higher, between 3 to 3½ inches. He also

suggested that when possible, mowing should be done in the cool of the evening or morning.

"Late August through mid-October is an optimal time to perform turfgrass maintenance and renovation, so long as your lawn gets a break during the summer months," he said. "When cooler temperatures return in the fall, grasses once again will be able to green and to grow."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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