



Don't forget about the turf in the landscape

As the weather warms up, many homeowners are focused on the colorful flowers and plants they've got planned for their garden and landscape. But the base of any landscape is the turf, and it requires proper maintenance to help avoid problems and reduce the need for pesticides.

Proper turf care starts with irrigation, fertilization and good mowing practices. Sometimes, homeowners want to mow the turf quite low in hopes of not needing to mow as often. Unfortunately, this can induce stress on the turf. Raising the mowing blade to 2-3 inches for warm-season grass and 3-4 inches for cool-season grass during the summer enables the turf to establish a healthier root system.

Don't bag the clippings when mowing. Instead, use a mulching lawn mower or bag the clippings and spread them around the yard. The clippings have valuable nutrients that are beneficial.

It's no secret that irrigation and fertilization are crucial parts of good plant/lawn management. Apply both in a reasonable manner. It's a good idea to get a soil test done before applying fertilizer to avoid applying unnecessary elements. A slow-release fertilizer is a good choice for summer fertilizations as they can be applied less frequently.

Irrigation can be tricky in Oklahoma. Some summers, like last summer, are brutally hot and dry and keeping up with irrigation can be hard. Other summers it feels like monsoon season. Many homeowners water frequently, but not deep enough. This encourages shallow rooting, soil compaction, thatch accumulation and weed seed germination.

Ideally, your lawn should be watered on an as-needed basis, not on a regular schedule. Fluctuations in temperature, humidity, wind and precipitation all play a critical role in how often turfgrass should be watered. Also playing a role in the water schedule are management practices such as mowing and fertilization.

It's best to irrigate when the grass shows a water need. When turfgrasses experience moisture stress, their leaves begin to roll or fold and wilt. Apply enough water to wet the soil to a depth of about 6 inches. Probe the soil to see how deep the water is penetrating. After a few times homeowners will have a feel for the amount of time it takes for a deep watering. If you see the water beginning to puddle and run-off occurs, stop irrigating and give the water time to soak into the soil. It may be necessary to repeat this cycle several times in order to achieve a proper, deep watering. This method will encourage deep rooting.

Most healthy lawns will require some pesticide applications. Before treating a turf problem, make sure to properly identify the problem first. Check with your county Oklahoma State

University Extension office or a turfgrass professional for help in identifying the issue and finding an appropriate treatment.