



Fact Sheet

Chesterfield County

Department of Public Affairs

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Waterwise lawn and landscape care



Knowing how and when to water helps to keep a yard healthy and costs down. The Chesterfield County office of Virginia Cooperative Extension, in cooperation with the county's Planning and Utilities departments, encourages residents to use water wisely.

- **Know the soil.** No amount of watering will compensate for poor soil quality. Test soil every two to three years to determine whether fertilizer or lime is needed. Test kits are available at any Chesterfield County library or the local Virginia Cooperative Extension office.
- **Avoid daily lawn watering.** Excessive watering hinders root growth and can cause fungal disease and fertilizer and pesticide runoff. Most lawns need an inch of water per week, including rainfall. A deep watering every three to four days is better than a short watering every day. To ensure the proper amount of water, set out flat-bottom containers to measure how long it takes to achieve a ½ inch of water, and set sprinklers or irrigation systems to water for that amount of time twice weekly. Sensors are available that prevent irrigation systems from continuing to water when it rains, conserving water and reducing costs.
- **Use mulch and compost.** A 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch under trees and on landscape beds will help to retain moisture. A ¼- to ½-inch layer of compost scattered on an established lawn helps retain moisture and nourishes the lawn, reducing water and fertilizer needs. More than a ½ inch of compost can harm an established lawn.

Mowing

- **Mow at the proper height.** For cool-season lawns, including fescue and bluegrass, mow to no less than 2 ½ inches, preferably 3 ½ inches. This keeps the soil shaded, reduces moisture loss and inhibits weeds. Mow warm-season grasses, including bermudagrass and zoysiagrass, at 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches.
- **Keep mower blades sharp.** A dull blade tears grass, leaving jagged edges that turn brown and increase the risk of lawn diseases. Clean cuts heal quickly.
- **Mow during the evening.** The lawn will recover quickly in the cool night air.
- **Use a mower's mulch setting.** Rather than raking up grass clippings or dumping a mower bag, let the clippings recycle nutrients into the lawn.

Rethink your yard

- **Choose grass types suited to the Central Virginia climate.** Virginia Cooperative Extension recommends tall fescue, bermudagrass or zoysiagrass. Fescue is the least heat and drought tolerant but remains green during the cool months. Bermudagrass and zoysiagrass, which turn brown during winter, remain green during hot, dry summers because they use water very efficiently.
- **Create large landscape beds.** Replace lawn area with plant beds that require less watering. More landscape beds mean less grass to water and mow.
- **Use native plants.** Plants native to an area are more tolerant of local conditions, including weather, disease and insects, and require less water and fertilizer to thrive. To learn more, visit plantmoreplants.com and select "what to plant." Chesterfield County is a partner in the Plant More Plants program.
- **Create healthy soil.** Practice organic lawn care to improve soil structure and reduce the need for fertilizer, pesticides and water. Aerate to allow air and water to get to the roots. Use compost to amend the soil.
- **Plant alternative groundcovers that need less water and fertilizer.** Possibilities include clover, moss, and low-growing ornamental grasses and sedums. Consider what the area is used for before selecting a groundcover.
- **Let the lawn go dormant.** Choose to stop watering lawns during the hottest part of summer. An established lawn will revive with fall rains.

More tips for trees, shrubs and gardens

- Shrubs and trees need at least 1 inch of water every 10-14 days. Flowers and vegetables need at least 1 inch of water weekly. Measure rainfall and apply at least a ½ inch of water when necessary.
- Use drip irrigation or soaker hoses for gardens and a slow trickle from a garden hose to water trees and shrubs. This provides more effective watering while using up to 70 percent less water than sprinklers.
- Test the soil to be sure that pH is correct and that plants are being fertilized properly. Too much fertilization encourages excessive growth that requires more watering and pruning.
- Contact Virginia Cooperative Extension for a helpful publication about proper planting.

Call the Chesterfield County office of Virginia Cooperative Extension at 804-751-4401 or visit the Cooperative Extension page (under Departments) at chesterfield.gov.