

# Watering and Fertilising Lawns

**This advice is for warm season turf types like Couch, Kikuyu, Buffalo and Zoysia lawns. It is not suitable for cool climate lawns such as Fescue, Rye Grass, and Blue Grass.**

**In most parts of Australia it is important to water really deeply and less frequently. It is only in places like Perth with its extremely sandy soil that this is more difficult.**

## For Most of Australia

Watering once a week in summer is usually enough, provided the water is a deep one. It's best to saturate the lawn using a sprinkler for about an hour or more. This will ensure the water gets in deep and it will encourage the roots to follow the water down and grow deeper, making your lawn more drought tolerant. After a lawn has been in a few years and it becomes very drought tolerant, you may be able to water heavily every two weeks in summer in some parts of Australia. If it rains, take that into account and water less. In the cooler months lawns rarely need watering if rain occurs occasionally.

A lawn will actually tell you when it needs watering. The leaves will start to wilt slightly. If this happens it is time to water. Water restrictions make deep watering harder, as you are only allowed to water occasionally, and often by hand. In a way, more

## For Perth

As Perth has sandy soils, the water will quickly leach through the root zone. Getting the roots to grow deep is still important, so during spring, winter, and autumn, try deeper less frequent watering. Often you can get away with once per week in the less hot periods. In summer, lawns in Perth do better if watered twice per week, which under the regular water restrictions is often all that is allowed.

frequent hand watering actually wastes more water than deep infrequent watering, but you can only work to the rules. If the rules make it hard to do deep infrequent watering, then just do your best within the rules.

With warm climate turf like Buffalo, Couch, Kikuyu, and Zoysia, they may brown off when there is no water and water restrictions prevent irrigation, but when it rains again they will usually come back. In low rainfall areas such as inland Australia, grasses with underground runners will survive longer periods of drought. Buffalo is the only one without underground runners, so it is a little more important for Buffalo to not let it thin out due to long periods of drought. Try not to leave Buffalo brown from drought stress for more than a week if possible.

## Wetting Agents

Often soil becomes hydrophobic, meaning it repels water. If you use a wetting agent, it will allow the water to soak in again. Wetting agents come in liquid forms that can simply be sprayed or hosed on, for example, Yates Waterwise Hose On Soil Saturator. Yates Waterwise Soil Saturator for Lawns is a product that contains Dynamic Lifter and other elements, so it will also provide some nutritional benefits. Combination products

like these make life easier. Another combination product is Scotts Lawn Builder™ with Wetting Agent. This has a slow release fertiliser, which will feed your lawn for about 10 weeks.



## Fertilising Your Lawn

Research conducted by Ozbreed Pty Ltd proved that autumn is the most important time to fertilise your lawn. Fertilising in spring for most lawn types is not enough. The minimum fertiliser needed by a lawn is twice per year, but that is only if you use a slow release fertiliser like Scotts Lawn Builder or Yates Lawn Master. These fertilisers last 10 weeks per application. So fertilising a few weeks into autumn is very important, as too is fertilising in early spring.

Unfortunately, most fertiliser types do not have special blends for appropriate times of the year. Recently, Ozbreed released a special Slow Release Spring Blend, and a Slow Release Summer/Autumn Blend. Spring needs higher nitrogen levels, autumn

and summer need lower nitrogen levels and higher potassium levels for better root growth. These can only be bought online at [www.ozbreed.com.au/store.html](http://www.ozbreed.com.au/store.html)

Summer fertilising is also important, but in summer it is very important not to use a fertiliser high in nitrogen. If you cannot get the special Summer/Autumn Blend from Ozbreed, then use half rates of the Scotts or Yates slow release fertiliser in summer. Too much nitrogen simply means extra mowing for no benefit. Too much nitrogen in summer makes the leaves of turf grow really fast, and worse it can make it more susceptible to some diseases.

## Why Slow Release Fertiliser is Better

Non slow release chemical fertilisers can burn your lawn if not watered in well, but worse still, they quickly dissolve and often only work for a few days. The unused portions generally wash away from the lawn, and regularly end up in storm water. Slow release types dissolve over a long period, making

them safer for the environment and better value as they keep fertilising week after week. Organic fertilisers are better than easily dissolved chemical fertilisers, but they still release much quicker than a slow release fertiliser, meaning they do not work for as long.

## Never Use Weed and Feed Fertilisers!

They are just not good for your lawn. Lawn professionals often do not agree on many issues, but this is one matter that finds common ground. They do not like weed and feed products. They have high rates of soluble nitrogen fertiliser that will quickly leach into the soil. They not only disappear quickly, they are often washed into drains and storm water and they do very little for your lawns health. They simply encourage upward leaf growth and provide a quick green up. They do little for the roots, stolons and rhizomes. They can cause damage to the soils and the microorganisms in the soil. The ones that work by burning the flat broad leaf weeds can (if they are applied on a hot day without watering in) burn your lawn. If you

water them in quickly they will not kill the weeds. The ones with chemicals can sometimes hurt Buffalo turf, and are highly inefficient. You spread the weed and feed all over the lawn, rather than just killing the weeds that need killing in the spots that are infested. It's over use of chemicals. In fact it has been reported that Canada is banning these types of products. Australia probably will not go this far, but if people avoid these, maybe the companies will concentrate on their better products.

Rather than use weed and feed, buy two products. Fertilise with a good slow release fertiliser and use a herbicide to control the broad leaf weeds.