

# LAWN CARE

## A Factsheet from Austin Energy's Green Building Program

Thirty-eight percent of the water consumed in Austin is used for outside watering. In summertime, this figure rises to over 50 percent. Using 'green' principles in lawn care can make a significant impact on both our environment and our water bills. Green lawn care principles can also aid in energy conservation and reduce the need for chemicals and fertilizers.

### Plantings

- Select plants that require a minimal amount of supplemental watering. Native plants are well adapted to the natural soil and rainfall conditions of our area. They have protection mechanisms that cause them to go dormant during periods of stress. They may appear brown, but will turn green again when temperatures improve and it rains.
- Choose plants from the City of Austin Preferred Plant List - they do best in our area, require less water and attract fewer pests. Call 974-2199 to obtain a copy of the list.
- Plant a variety of plant species. Diversity of plant species occurs in nature, making more stable plant populations. Avoid planting large numbers of only one plant species, which can create a monoculture susceptible to pest or insect problems.
- Use Texas-grown plants if possible. This cuts down transportation costs and increases the viability of plant materials. The Texas Department of Agriculture has a consumer awareness program which labels plants "Texas Grown" with a special tag. Look for these tags and ask for Texas-grown plants when ordering.

In general:

- Apply 2-4 inches of organic mulch (e.g., bark mulch, straw) yearly to retain moisture.
- Keep plantings (and mulch) away from foundation.

### Watering

- Use low-flow irrigation equipment. Evaporation losses can be minimized by drip irrigation, soaker hoses, or bubblers.
- Water only when plants need it and then water deeply. As a general rule, during the growing season, most grass needs about three-quarters of an inch of water per week. This will vary depending on soil type and depth, sun, plant conditions, and rainfall occurrence. Irrigation equipment should be tested to determine how long it takes to apply just enough water.
- Irrigate in the coolest and calmest part of the day (early mornings and evenings) to avoid evaporation loss and wind drift.
- Allow the soil to dry out between waterings. Plants need air almost as much as water. Homeowners can learn to recognize the signals of a thirsty landscape - shrubs will begin to droop and grass will begin to wilt and leave footprints when walked on.
- Watering can taper off gradually as fall arrives and gradually increase in spring. Plants don't need as much water in winter, but will still benefit from monthly irrigation if there is no precipitation.

How to Water Sod:

- New sod *until* roots attach to soil: Keep soil moist, but not soggy. Water daily if needed for the first 10 days (unless it rains). Lift a corner of sod to check root attachment and moist soil. Water every other day for the next 10 days. Then every third day for 10 days. After 30 days, follow the City's five-day watering schedule.
- Avoid watering between 10:00 am –7:00pm.
- In winter, water about once per month (unless it rains). Roots will grow; tops won't grow until spring.
- Never allow water to run off the property or down the street.

### Fertilizing

When?

- Not before you have mowed at least 3 times in the spring.
- Fertilize in April and again in September, if needed.

WATER

- Always water in fertilizer to avoid pollution of waterways. Don't fertilize if rain is imminent.

How much?

- Don't over-fertilize. That causes the leaves to grow much faster than the roots. The grass will then require more water and more frequent mowing and attract more pests. (Keep fertilizer off of paved areas.)

What kind?

- Use slow-release fertilizer containing only nitrogen (N) if possible. These products release nutrients slowly to the plants, making frequent fertilizing unnecessary and minimizing the risk of fertilizer washing out of sites to become non-point source pollution. Local soil tests usually find abundant levels of phosphorous (P) and potassium (K).
- Dillo Dirt is recommended. Dillo Dirt is a recycled, composted material that includes about 5-10% sewage sludge. It is produced by the City of Austin at the Hornsby Bend Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- Avoid all weed-and-feed products. They kill trees!

### **Mowing and Weeding**

- The first time you mow in spring, mow lower to remove dead grass. But be careful not to scalp your lawn!
- Gradually raise the mower blade to normal by mid-June. Taller grass protects the roots from summer sun and winter cold.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn. They are high in nitrogen and make a good fertilizer.
- It's best to pull weeds by hand. But you have to do this often enough to keep ahead of them! Weeds do well here because of our long growing season.
- If the weeds are out of control, use a product called a "pre-emergent" as a last resort. Get the one recommended for your grass type and use it in the correct season.

### **Resources**

Texas Natural Resource Conservation  
Commission  
Irrigation Certification Program  
MC-178  
P.O. Box 13087  
Austin, TX 78711-3087  
(512) 239-6719  
[www.tnrcc.state.tx.us](http://www.tnrcc.state.tx.us)  
*(for list of licensed irrigators)*

City of Austin  
Compost Manager  
Hornsby Bend WWTF  
2210 S. FM 973  
Austin, Texas 78725  
(512) 929-1001,  
[www.ci.austin.tx.us/sws/compost.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/sws/compost.htm)  
*(for information about Dillo Dirt)*

Texas Board of Architectural Examiners  
P. O. Box 12337  
Austin, Texas 78711-2337  
(512) 305-9000  
<http://www.tbae.state.tx.us>  
*(for list of registered landscape architects)*

Texas A & M University  
Horticulture: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>  
Turf: <http://aggie-turf.tamu.edu>  
Irrigation: <http://texaset.tamu.edu/> and  
<http://plantanswers.tamu.edu/drought/droug4.html>

Texas Nursery & Landscape Association  
7730 S. IH35  
Austin, TX 78745  
(512) 280-5182  
[www.txnla.org](http://www.txnla.org)  
*(find certified nursery or landscape professionals)*

WaterWise Council of Texas  
7730 South IH 35  
Austin, TX 78745  
(512) 280-5182  
[www.waterwisetexas.org](http://www.waterwisetexas.org)  
*(for information on water conservation)*

City of Austin  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, TX 78767  
Water Conservation Program  
(512) 499-2199  
[www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon)  
*(Xeriscape, free irrigation audits and summer watering calendar)*

City of Austin  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, TX 78767  
Grow Green  
(512) 974-2550  
[www.growgreen.org](http://www.growgreen.org)  
*(Earthwise landscaping options)*

City of Austin  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, TX 78767  
Green Garden  
(512) 974-2550  
[www.cityofaustin.org/greengarden](http://www.cityofaustin.org/greengarden)  
*(All city landscaping programs - tips and rebates)*