

Tall Fescue

Irrigation Guide

The following recommendations are based upon scientific research, horticultural principles and the expertise learned in growing and maintaining Fescue.

In order to better understand the amount of supplemental water required by Fescue, one first needs to understand its growth cycle. Fescue is a plant that greens up in the spring (April, May and June) and goes dormant during the winter months (November through March). The two primary growth periods are early spring as it comes out of winter dormancy and the fall as it prepares for winter. During these periods, water and nutrients are essential for the plant to remain viable and healthy.

Being an adaptable plant, Fescue can adjust to most consumer requirements by the addition or reduction of water, fertilizer and mowing. The amount of supplemental water may vary as current weather conditions change. One simple method of determining whether the grass needs watering is to observe the dehydration signs given by the grass. They are:

Stage 1: grass has a purplish tint

Stage 2: grass blades turn steel gray and footprints are left when walked on

Stage 3: grass blades turn straw color

There are numerous ways of watering. Some people drag hoses with a variety of attached sprinklers. Others have automatic sprinkler systems. Some even use weather-based or soil moisture-based controllers.

The amount of water applied can be measured by rain gauges, setting out cans in the lawn in the area covered by the sprinklers, or understanding the application rates of the sprinkler system. However, most consumers over-water! Some set their automatic sprinkler clocks and don't change them despite climatic changes. This method has been shown to be the most wasteful.

The real question is how much water must be applied to get the desired results? The answer is not a simple one because the variables and requirements are always changing - climactic conditions are not constant, water availability varies and consumers desire different outcomes.

In order to be a better water manager, all factors must be considered. Each lawn environment is different. Was the ground properly prepared? What type of soil is there? What type of grass is it? When and how much was it fertilized? How was it mowed? What is the purpose of the lawn?

Other major questions are: What would happen if the amount of water applied was less? How will it look? What will be the possible results? Will the grass go dormant and survive? The approximate amount of water that needs to be applied each week to supplement natural rainfall is listed in the following chart:

Approximate Supplemental Water for an Average TALL FESCUE LAWN (inches per week)	
April	.25"
May	.7"
June	.95"
July	.95"
August	.85"
September	.67"
October	.4"

Data for the chart is based on historical averages and do not predict the future. This is a guideline, not a substitute for good judgment, reason and common sense. If your water provider imposes weekly restrictions, then divide the weekly amount by the number of days watering is allowed. Example: If there is a 2 day a week restriction and the month is May, .7 inch is divided by 2 days = .35" of water per day.

It should be obvious that good water management requires analysis coupled with reasonable judgment. Because of the many variables, it is impossible to give one answer that fits all lawn environments at all times. However, by utilizing the information provided, better results will be gained and water will be more prudently used. People waste the water- not the grass!

