



HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR LAWN IN OUR UNPREDICTABLE CLIMATE

**36% GARDENERS REPORT THAT THEIR LAWNS GROW ALL YEAR
44% GARDENERS NOW MOW LAWNS A MONTH EARLIER IN SPRING
(WRAP May 2007)**

**Our poor lawns just do not know what is going on
Summer 2006 they were dry and parched from the drought.
Summer 2007 they experienced monsoon conditions.**

It does appear that one of the biggest changes to the English garden is the effect of climate change on our lawns. The traditional English lawn is certainly under attack and as gardeners we may have to review our dream of the perfect green lawn throughout the year.

The main problem for lawns now is that, due to our changing weather patterns, there is no longer the same predictable cycle that has helped lawns in the UK to establish over many centuries.

Endless dry spells are not good for lawns and they need lots of help keeping their traditional green.

Longer wetter spells cause them to be invaded by moss which spreads rapidly, preventing the grass from regrowing were the moss has taken over. It is then much harder to produce a lush green lawn unless you treat the moss effectively.

Lawns need air, light and free-draining soil to thrive so here are simple but effective ways to treat your lawn in our changing climate.

DEALING WITH DROUGHT

When grass is under extreme heat and drought stress, leaves will die and turn straw colour.

You can check the health of your grass by peeling the blades back and look for the green base at ground level. If you can keep this base level green, even though your lawn looks brown on top, your lawn should survive the summer. When conditions are more ideal, usually in September or when even we get sufficient rain fall, the grass will turn green again,

Watering your lawn can cause more stress as a small amount of water forces the roots closer to the surface.

If this happens the roots become more vulnerable and can be affected more by higher temperatures. Root growth actually ceases on our cool-season grasses (such as bluegrass, dwarf rye grass and fescues) once soil temperatures climb above 70F.

So, if having a green lawn throughout the summer is important to you and you are in an area that constantly experiences drought we would recommend that you use drought resistant grasses. Grasses such as the turf-type creeping red fescue and chewing fescue or smooth stalked meadow grass should assist.

Do not give your lawn the regular once a week crop cut when it is very dry and suffering from heat stress. The longer the blades the more the lawn will survive these extreme conditions - the long grass serves as a sun-screen for the roots which will suffer less damage.

WET WEATHER TIPS

During wet periods it is best to try and not put too much traffic over your lawn as this causes compaction and impedes the grasses from growing well. Any areas which are liable to flooding would benefit from being aerated.

Don't cut the grass too short if there has been a prolonged wet spell. It is better to cut the lawn once to take off the top of the grass and then again in a few days.

Try these LOVE YOUR LAWN ideas

Look at more drought resistant grasses – bluegrass, ryegrass and fescues

Over-mowing is the worst thing for dry lawns

Very long lawns - grown to a height of 3 -4 inches will help keep down moss problems and crowd out some weeds.

Establish good roots in your lawn before summer

You should water early in the morning or late evening to avoid evaporation and allow water to soak into the ground for maximum benefit (be aware late evening can cause some fungal infection due to cold water sitting on the warm ground during the night)

Only water if absolutely necessary and from a renewable source (harvested rain water ideally)

Under watered lawns do not need any fertiliser

Raise the mowing height to at least 2 inches to keep the crown and roots cooler

Learn to accept that your lawn may turn brown when it is dry

Aerate your lawn to stimulate root growth by spiking with a fork

Water infrequently with thorough waterings to keep roots deep

Never water in sunlight

