

Lawn Care During a Drought

With dry and hot weather conditions and the implementation of water use restrictions in many areas where watering of lawns is prohibited, many lawns will be turning brown. **However, this is not an indication that the lawn grass is dead or dying, the grasses have simply implemented an excellent drought strategy, GOING DORMANT.** The crown and roots of the grasses are still alive but in order to conserve water have stopped active growth. In Manitoba most healthy lawns should be strong enough to go into drought dormancy and remain alive, ready to grow again when conditions improve (i.e. cooler temperatures and rain-fall).



Most lawns in Manitoba consist of cool season grass species like Kentucky Bluegrass, Fine Fescues and Perennial Ryegrass. These grasses will go dormant in hot, dry conditions which is a plus for survivability but will typically look brown without adding irrigation water.



An easy and very effective strategy to keep your lawn greener for longer, in times of drought, is to mow higher. Lawn grasses will grow deeper roots and access more moisture reserves deeper in the soil. Ideally set your mower to cut at a height between 2.5 to 3 inches tall (6.3 – 7.6 cm). The taller grass will also provide more shade to the ground surface keeping it cooler and conserving moisture.

Delay applying broadleaf lawn herbicides when conditions are hot and dry as the weeds will not absorb herbicides effectively under these conditions. The herbicides can also add more stress to the lawn grasses during a drought.

If establishing a new lawn use lawn grass mixtures that contain more Fescue type grasses than Kentucky Bluegrass (KBG). These are typically branded as Parkland or Low Maintenance mixes. Fescue type grasses can consist of Creeping Red Fescue, Hard Fescue, Sheep Fescue and Chewings Fescue. They are more drought tolerant, have deeper root systems than KBG which are shallow rooted (top 6 inches of the soil). The Fine Fescues are able to access deeper soil moisture reserves and therefore will go dormant later than KBG.

So remember your lawn may look brown but it will survive and return to a lush, green lawn with the return of rain.

Anthony Mintenko - Fruit specialist

crops@gov.mb.ca

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