

Drought Stress in Lawns

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Suddenly Seeing Drought Stress? Here's a quick tip!



The good news is that drought stress in your lawn is not a permanent condition. Those brown patches of grass that can show up during the hotter part of the summer are a protective mechanism that many plants, including lawn grasses, will activate when they're not getting enough water. There are several ways to deal with lawn drought, but first, you must identify the problem.

What Causes Drought Stress in Plants?

Many plants release a specific hormone when they're not getting enough water. ***The hormone that helps plants respond to drought is abscisic acid.*** When your lawn experiences drought-like conditions, the grasses release more abscisic acid. This causes plants to close the stomata, so less water is lost through transpiration. It may be ugly when it happens on your front lawn, but this is how the grass is able to survive longer without enough water.

How to Identify Drought Stress?

Once you spot brown patches on your lawn, try the following to make sure that drought stress is what you're dealing with:

- Find a brown patch on your lawn and pull on the grass. If the root structure stays firmly attached to the soil, it's probably drought stress.
- Poke a screwdriver into the soil in a green spot and then in a brown spot on your lawn. If the soil is harder in the brown patches, that means those locations aren't getting enough water.
- Look at your entire lawn. Drought stress tends to show up in random patches. Is the grass greener near sprinkler heads, in the shade and in low-lying areas? If the answer to those questions is yes, then it is

most likely drought stress.

What to Do About Lawn Drought Stress?

- **Check and clean your sprinkler filter heads.** A clogged filter head can prevent your sprinkler system from watering the whole lawn surface. Most sprinkler systems have a simple mechanism that can be disassembled with a screwdriver or a pair of needle-nosed pliers. Cleaning the filters out or replacing them can bring your lawn back to life.

Secondary Water can clog pop ups over time, keeping your sprinklers from doing their job.



This sprinkler is supposed to cover a distance of 12-15 feet. With a clogged filter, it's only spraying a few feet at best.



Here is how the same sprinkler should look when functioning properly with a cleaned filter.



Checking & Cleaning the filters can quickly resolve your problem in many cases.



Use some Needle Nose Pliers to lift the riser from the body, and unscrew the nozzle.



Look how nasty these filters are! Clearly debris is keeping water from flowing through the filter to the nozzle.



- **Water the lawn sufficiently for your type of grass.** A lot of people try to keep their lawns green and their water bills down by running the sprinklers frequently, but with less water. Hello, drought stress! Deeper watering to reach the root structures works better. Cool seasonal grasses need at least an inch of water per week, for example, split over two half-inch watering sessions.
- **Raise your lawnmower blade.** The root structure for any plant is usually proportional to the height of the plant. Raising your lawn mower blade to a height of at least 3 inches will allow the grass to grow a little bit taller and the roots will reach that much deeper. This allows the roots to reach more water and helps prevent drought stress.
- **Don't fertilize your lawn during the hottest part of the summer.** Fertilizer is usually not a good solution for drought stress in plants. In fact, it can make the situation worse!
- **Call Big League Lawns.** We have more than 40 years' experience in lawn care, serving Weber and Davis counties in Utah. We'll provide you with a free lawn analysis if you give us a call at 801-917-6572.