Now it is Clear if it Was Inadequate Irrigation on the Lawn

Distribute 08-18-2016

The 4 inches of rain that most of us received last week answered a lot of questions about our lawns. The main one was,” What is causing my lawn to be brown?” For most landscapes the answer was a lack of moisture. A much simpler answer than the chinch bugs, take-all-patch or grubs that we suspected!

If your lawn greened up with the rain, it can stay that way if you sign up and follow the SAWS weekly watering recommendation and your irrigation system is functioning well. If the rains greened up the lawn uniformly and your irrigation does not, it means the system needs work to apply water more evenly, or that your soil has shallow or compacted areas under the sod. Your irrigation contractor can correct the sprinkler malfunctions and the soil issues can be corrected by adding compost and aeration.

To sign up for the free lawn watering advice visit the SAWS website at gardenstylesa@saws.org . The weekly email is free and you do not have to be a SAWS customer to participate.

With the rain, the lawn will start growing again. Mow St Augustine grass at 3 to 3.5 inches high. Zoysia does well when mowed at 2 inches. Mow Bermuda grass at the lowest height that your mower is capable of, and no higher than 1.5 inches. Buffalo grass needs to be treated like a groundcover and mowed at about 5.5 inches tall if it is going to resist weeds.

The rain will stimulate a new crop of hot weather weeds to germinate which will be followed by the cool weather weeds. The cool weather weeds such as bedstraw, rescue grass, dandelions, thistle, beggar’s lice, and annual rye can be greatly reduced by an application of pre-emergent herbicide such as Amaze, XL, Gallery, or Portrait at the end of August. Follow label instructions for all pesticides.

One of the most prevalent hot weather weeds is Bermuda grass. It spreads by stolons (stems), rhizomes (roots) and seed. You can attempt to pull it (and may have to from the vegetable garden) or you can use a contact herbicide such as Ornamec, Over the Top, Poast, or Grass-be-Gone if the offending Bermuda grass is in the flower garden or shrub border. These contact herbicides are specific for grasses. If label instructions are followed, they kill the Bermuda grass, including roots, and do not hurt the other plants.

New sand burs will also emerge. If they are in the lawn you can apply Image as a contact herbicide for young plants. Make sure that you obtain the formula with sand burs on the label. Once the burs appear on the plants, dig the plants, burs and all, out of the ground with the tip of a spade. Put them in the garbage.

Wait to fertilize the lawn until the last week in September or first week in October. That timing contributes to cold hardiness and a fast green-up next spring.

For new lawns it is too late to seed Bermuda grass but sod can be applied as long as it is available from a reliable retailer. In addition to adequate and frequent water, the key to sod success to make sure there is good root to soil contact. Borrow a sod roller from your sod supplier. For the complete story on successful sod application read the materials available in plantanswers.com.