

## Water Restrictions

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The main provision of Stage 1 of the SAWS water restrictions is that sprinkler irrigation must be limited to once per week on the day of week that relates to the last digit of your address. On Mondays the homes with the addresses that end in 0 and 1 may irrigate. If your address ends with 2 or 3, you water on Tuesday. Wednesday is reserved for addresses that end with 4 or 5 and Thursday is the watering day for addresses that end in 6 and 7. Friday is your day to irrigate if your address ends in 8 or 9.

Because the evaporation rate is highest at midday all sprinkler irrigation must be completed before 11 am or after 7 pm in the evening. Overnight sprinkling after midnight is not allowed. Overnight sprinkling has more chance of being wasteful because of untended leaks and runoff. Watering with a handheld hose and drip irrigation is allowed any time during Stage 1.

There was a lot of thought and input that went into the Restrictions. The result is that they reduce water use significantly to protect the Aquifer but provide enough water and flexibility to maintain your landscape, and do not reduce the water available for existing jobs and economic growth.

We know that our lawn grass can survive (and usually prosper) with once/week sprinkler irrigation because of research conducted by Texas A&M, SAWS, and the Texas Turfgrass Association here in San Antonio in the early 2000s. The research has been verified by the performance of lawns during restriction periods in the years since. The research went further by providing results that allowed us to conclude that even our St Augustine lawns could survive on watering every 2 weeks. So far we have not had to verify those conclusions by moving into Stage 3 restrictions where irrigation is limited to once every two weeks.

Here are some recommendations to consider in dealing with the drought restrictions.

**Action Number One:** Visit the SAWS website at “Garden Style San Antonio” to sign up for the Landscape Newsletter. It includes a calculation of the water needed by the lawn every week based on the heat, humidity, and rainfall for the period. It is free and will be sent to you electronically every week.

**Action Number Two:** Call in your landscape contractor to inspect your irrigation system to make sure that all parts are functioning efficiently and there are no leaks. Repair the leaks and use the measurement of application rate to determine how long the system should run to apply one half inch of water over most of the lawn area. Also ask the irrigation contractor to replace your rain sensor if it is more than 2 years old. If you have forgotten how to manually operate the system ask the contractor to give you a lesson so you can adjust the length of the application. Change and apply the amount of water for the week based on the SAWS recommendation provided by their e-newsletter.

**Action Number Three:** An irrigation system that is poorly constructed or that requires maintenance has more problems dealing with drought restrictions than a well-planned and constructed system. Review the SAWS rebate offerings to consider available technology improvements and conversions of part of the system to drip irrigation. Drip irrigation is much more efficient in watering gardens and perennials than sprinkler irrigation.

**Action Number Four:** Every lawn is different. The drought management rules recognize that by allowing the use of hand watering any time. That means if you have an area that is especially prone to dry out

because of a slope, sun reflection or shallow soil you can supplement the regular sprinkler irrigation with hand-watering as needed.

Another effective tactic is to designate all or part of the lawn as an area that isn't watered. Bermuda, zoysia, and buffalo grass can dry out completely until the rains resume. They will green-up at that time without any long-term damage. As the research indicated, even St Augustine grass can survive two weeks (or longer in the shade) without water.

**Action Number Five:** It is ineffective to rely on sprinkler irrigation to irrigate your newly planted trees and shrubs. The good news is that well adapted species that are established can survive high temperatures and dry weather without supplemental irrigation. Water newly planted shrubs and trees directly at the base with a leaky hose or hand held hose. Don't be surprised if some plants that have been planted for 2 years or more will need this special attention. Use mulch over the root ball to make the watering more efficient.

**Action Number Six:** In the short term comply with drought management rules so aquifer levels are protected. In the long term convert water expensive and high maintenance lawn grass to more drought tolerant groundcovers, perennials, shrubs, mulch and hardscape.