## **New Science in Turf & Irrigation**

#### Dan Sandor, PhD

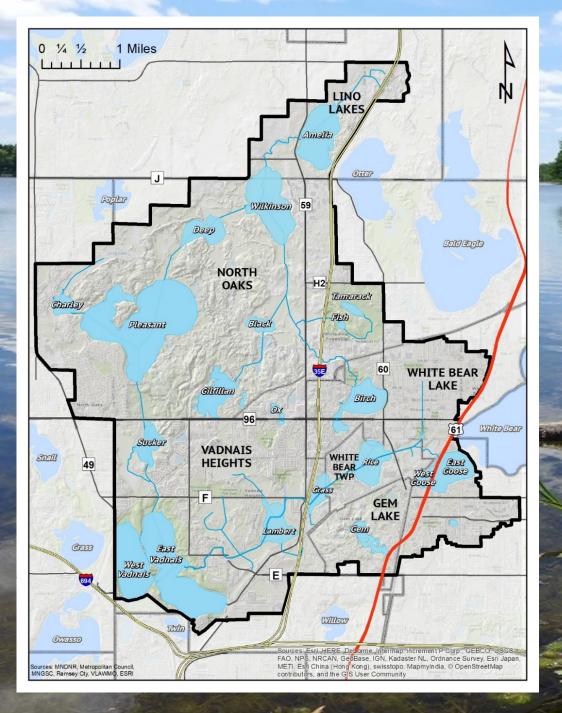
#### dsandor@umn.edu

Turfgrass Science Dept. of Horticultural Science **Web: turf.umn.edu Follow: @UMNTurf** 



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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA Driven to Discover®



#### What is VLAWMO?

- A local government agency formed in 1983.
- About 25 square miles covering parts or all of Vadnais Heights, Gem Lake, White Bear Lake, White Bear Township, Lino Lakes, and North Oaks.



## Wetlands







# Shallow Lakes

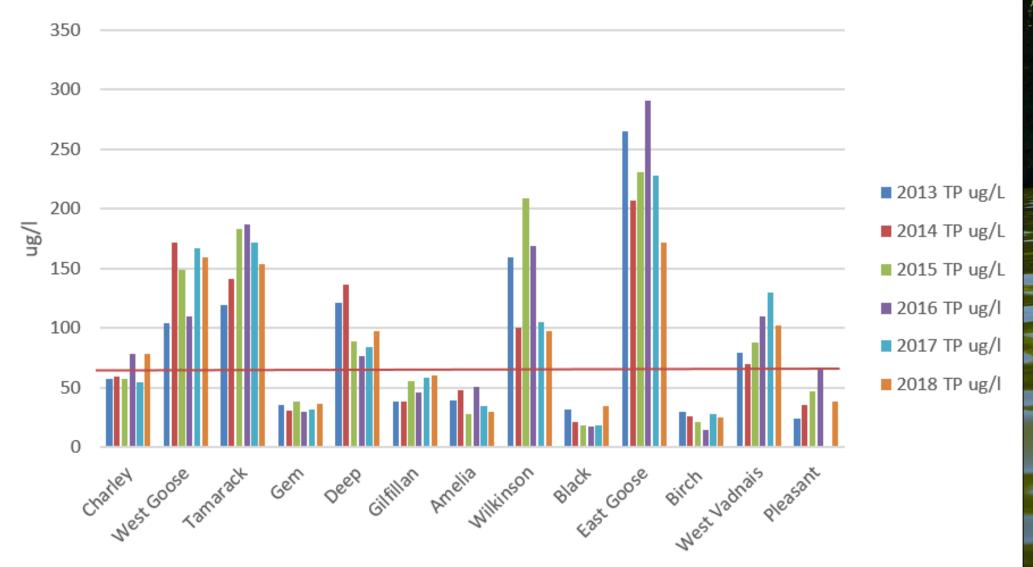


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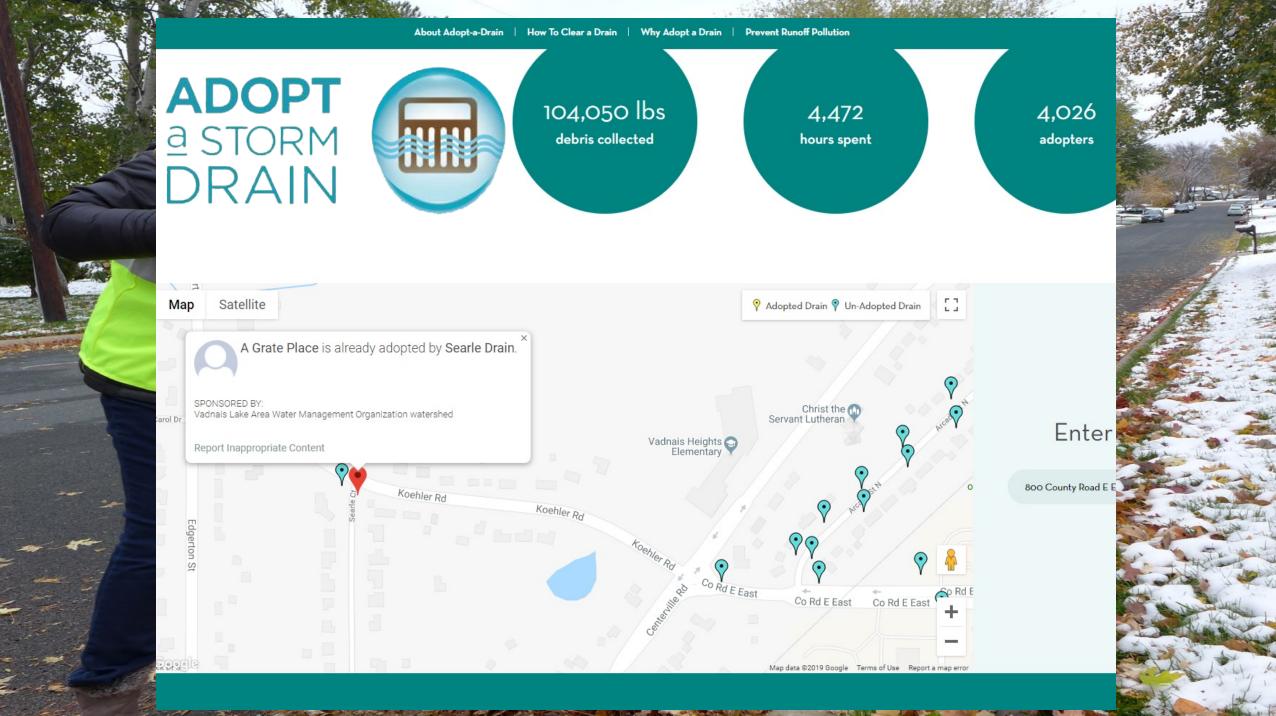
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#### VLAWMO Lakes Average TP 2013-2018



## **Cost-share Program**

#### ADOPT a STORM DRAIN Adopt-a-drain.org











#### The Magic is in the Roots!

E

Deep-rooted plants are the best option for native gardens, raingardens and shoreline plantings.

Check out the roots on these plant pictures. Which plant has the longest roots? Do you think turf grass would work well in a raingarden? Why or why not?



- Project-based volunteering
  - Citizen advisory
- Convenient one-and-done
  - Flyers or public surveys

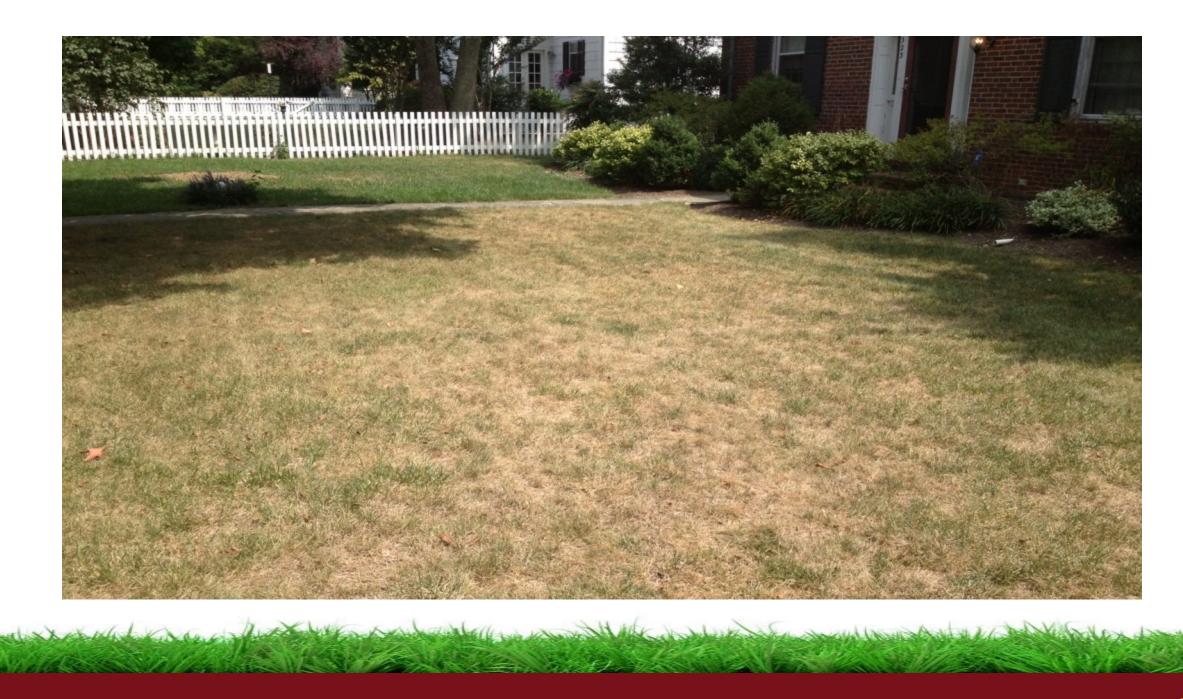
## **Connect with us!**

www.VLAWMO.org Blog, news, events, resources, seasonal email newsletter, WAV newsletter









### **Benefits of Turfgrass Lawns**

- Beard and Green, 1994

#### Environmental / Functional

– Erosion control, Dust prevention, Glare reduction, Heat dissipation, Carbon sequestration, Noise abatement, Groundwater recharge

#### Recreational

– Low-cost surface, Physical health, Safe surface, Social harmony

#### Aesthetic

Beauty, Enhanced quality of life, Improved mental health, Increased property values

## Why is water conservation important?

- Environmental sustainability
- Resource competition (Agriculture, Industry, Commercial / Residential)
- Decreasing supply → Increasing demand (urbanization)
- Utility Costs (\$\$\$)
- Plant Health



## **Lawn Irrigation**

#### Increased scrutiny

- Rising urbanization leads to competition for freshwater resources
- -Outdoor water use is visible to public
  - Irrigation during rain
  - Irrigation runoff onto impervious surfaces

#### –Lawn rebates & removal





HOME & GARDEN

#### His grass is greener: Minneapolis homeowner rips out lawn, puts in artificial turf

A southwest Minneapolis man has let go of his lawn mower and embraced artificial turf.

By Suzanne Ziegler Star Tribune MAY 30, 2018 – 10:07PM



RICHARD TSONG-TAATARII - STAR TRIBUNE

Larry Lee said he's used to people slowing down as they drive by his house in southwest Minneapolis. Passers-by even reach out and touch his lawn, intrigued by its year-round perfection.

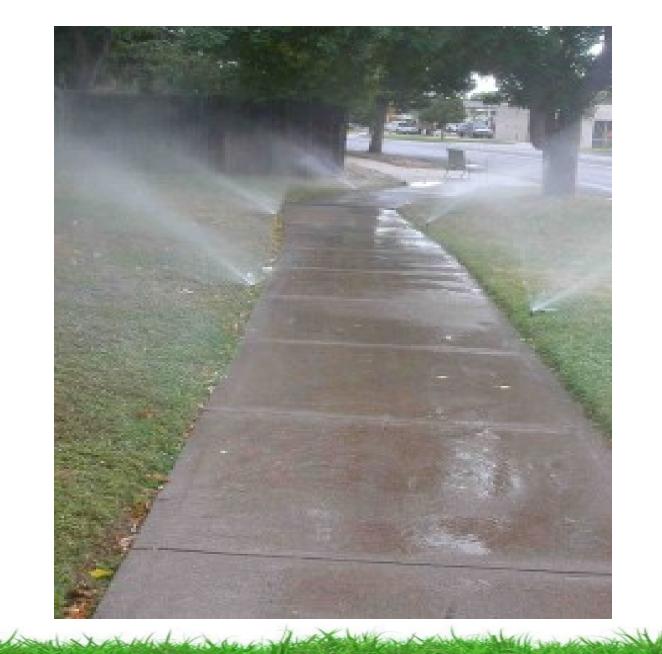
Everyone else's lawn may be a mushy yellow-brown in early spring, but Larry Lee's southwest Minneapolis yard is a vibrant, glorious green. In the summer, the only dandelions are in his neighbors' yards.

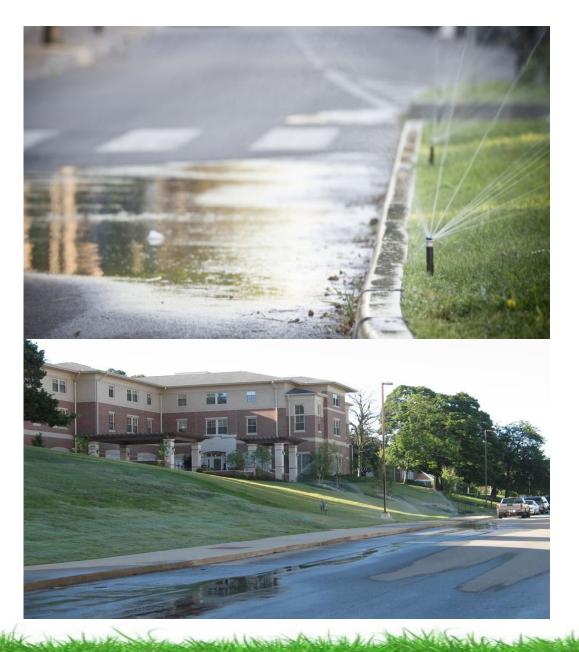
His lawn is so perfectly green that people who drive by slow down to stare.

### Lawn Irrigation











### **Lawn Irrigation**

- Water-Efficiency requires use of <u>Best Management Practices</u>
  - Turfgrass selection
  - Cultural practices
    - Mowing, Fertilization, Cultivation, Pesticide management
  - Irrigation: auditing and sensor/smart technologies
- NO SILVER BULLET!

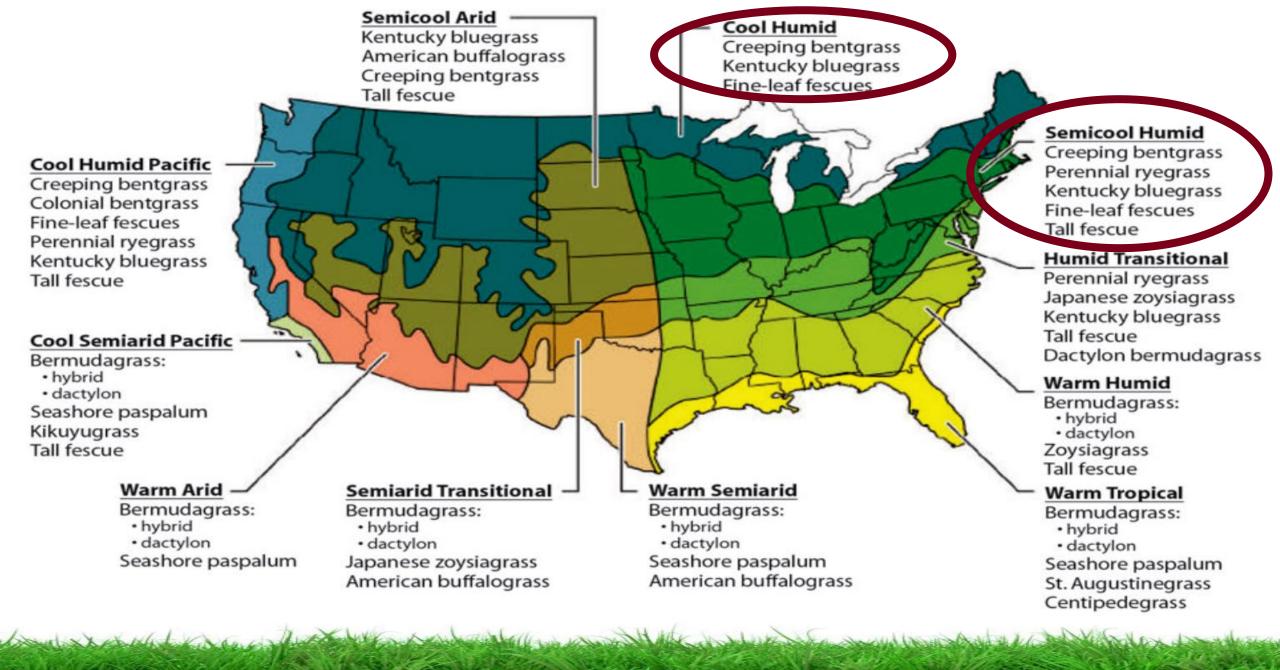


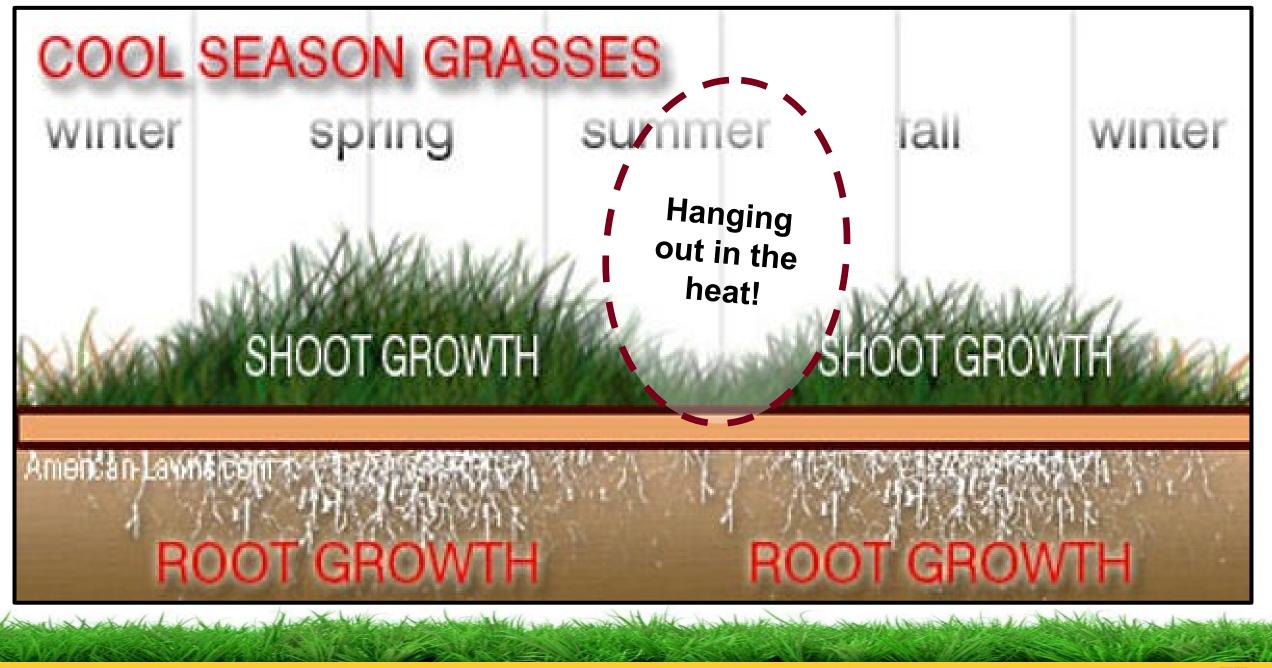
### **Turfgrass water requirements**

- Vary among turfgrass species and varieties
  - -Drought-resistant varieties and cultivars
  - -All shapes, sizes, colors
  - -Leaf texture, waxy leaf blades, leaf hairs, growth habit
- Are aesthetic problems due to drought or something else?

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- Shade tolerance, Fertility requirements, Mowing height tolerance, Soil compaction, ...







### **Turfgrass Water Conservation**

- Cool-season turfgrasses for Minnesota Lawns
  - <u>Tall fescue</u> Drought and Shade Tolerant
  - Kentucky bluegrass
  - Perennial Ryegrass
  - Fine fescues Very Low-Maintenance, Drought and Shade Tolerant
  - Rough bluegrass
     Supine bluegrass
- Select turf-type and drought-tolerant improved varieties

#### How much water do lawns require?

- <u>Turfgarss water requirements relative to performance and quality</u> <u>standards</u> (rather than production or yield standards such as in agriculture, consumer horticulture, etc.)
- Total amount of water required/utilized for plant growth, includes water lost by transpiration and evaporation from soil and plant surfaces







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#### tgwca.org

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rou mpty formation.	SPREADER SPREADER	NGS ERSEEDING/ HIN AREAS	BARE SPOTS/ NEW GRASS 14'
	Scotts* TurfBuilder Cussic und Partie States Scotts* TurfBuilder EdgeGuard* Mini Spreader Scotts* TurfBuilder* EdgeGuard* DLX Spreader	8½ 7½	10* 9* 24*
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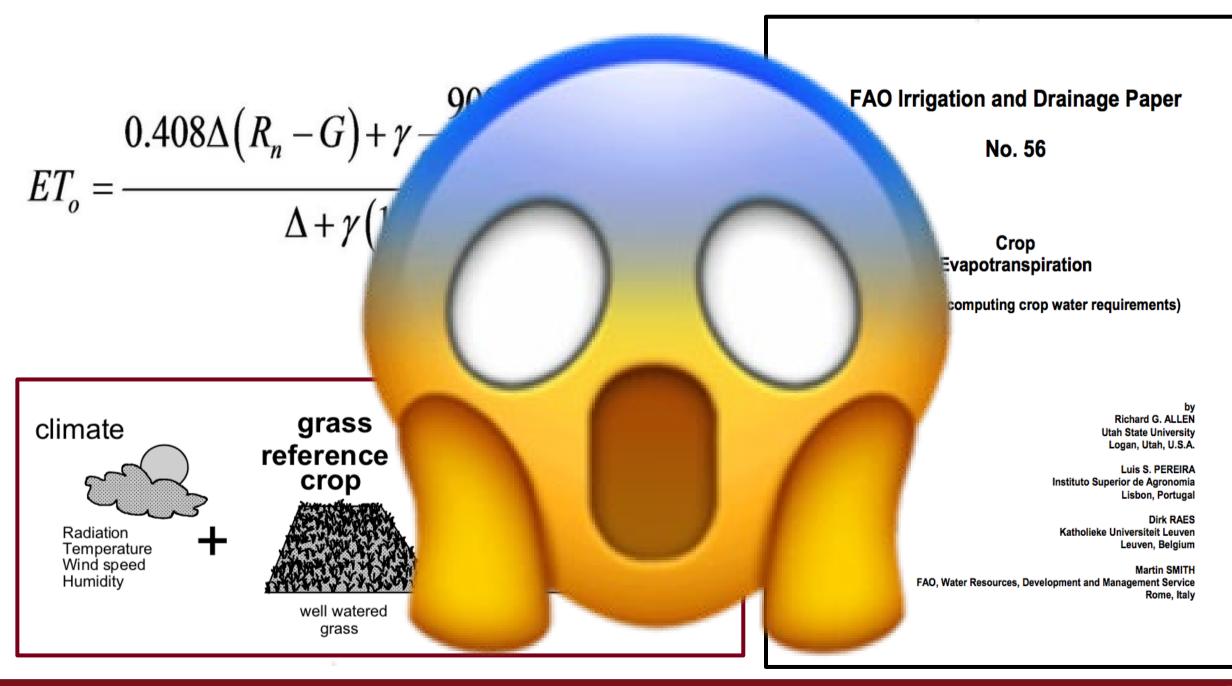
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## **Improving Irrigation-Efficiency**

Lawn water requirements influenced by environmental conditions:

- Evaporation: water loss from soil surface
- **Transpiration:** water loss from plant surfaces (similar to perspiration in humans)
- Irrigation should match ≤ evapotranspiration (ET)
- Environmental conditions influencing ET:
   Solar radiation (sunlight), Temperature, Humidity, Wind, Precipitation





### **Quantifying ET**

USDA / University Research
 Weather Station

Regional / local data



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### **Quantifying ET**

- Personal weather stations (on-site data)
- Ambient Weather WS-2902A Smart WiFi Weather Station

• \$170 (amazon.com)

OUTDOOR

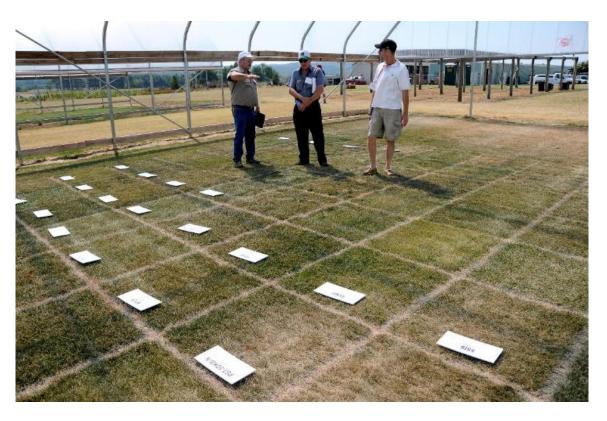
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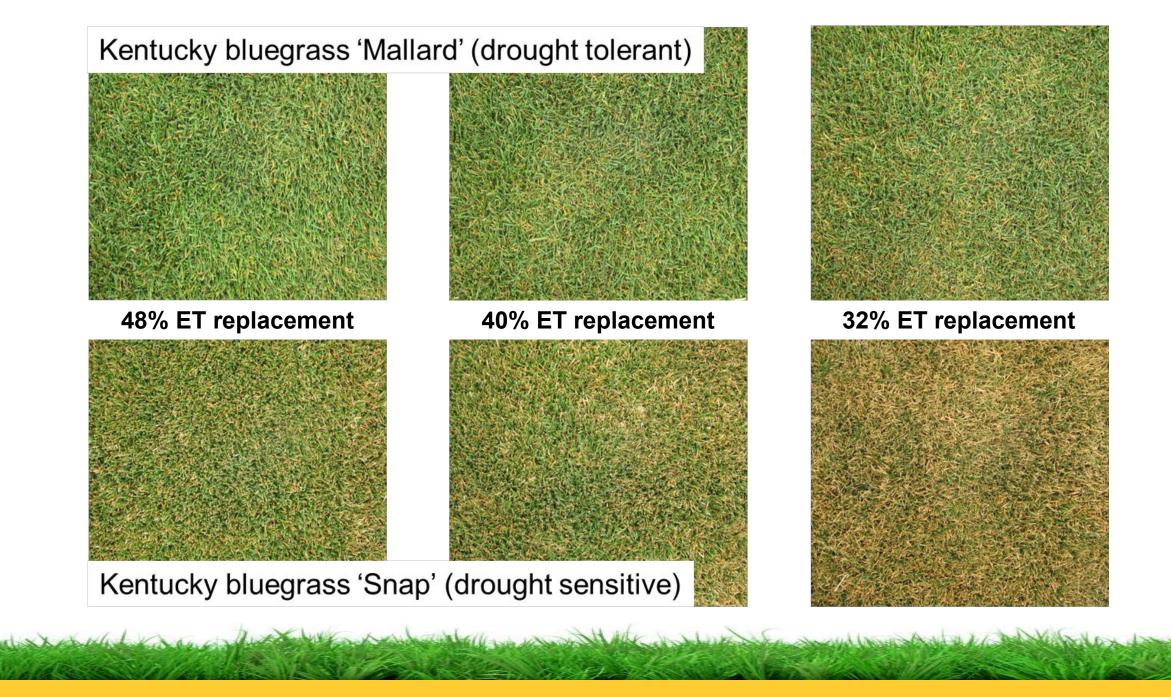
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#### lowinputturf.umn.edu

#### Low Input Turf Using Fine Fescues

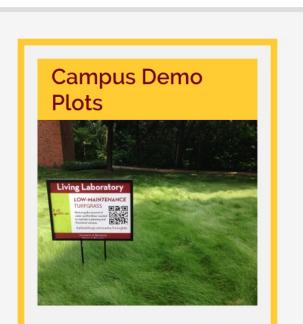
Currently, Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass are the two primary species used for turf in the northern United States. These species provide a high quality turf when managed with sufficient inputs; however, there has been increasing attention drawn to the negative aspects of higher input turfs, including the excessive use of water, fertilizer, fossil fuels, and pesticides.

The fine fescues – strong creeping red fescue, slender creeping red fescue, Chewings fescue, hard fescue, and sheep fescue – can be a solution to these challenges. Fine fescues are species of turfgrass that need less water, mowing, and fertilizer. These traits make the fine fescues a sustainable alternative to some of the traditionally used turfgrasses.

The next challenge is to identify ways to facilitate adoption of these fine fescues on private and public landscapes. Our team recently received a \$5.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to discover what is stopping homeowners from using fine fescues and how new varieties can be bred to overcome those obstacles. Our transdisciplinary approach will address social, marketing, technological, landscape management, and genetic barriers.

This project is a joint venture by participants from the University of Minnesota, Rutgers University, Purdue University, Oregon State University, University of Wisconsin and the USDA-ARS. It is funded by the <u>USDA Specialty Crops Research Initiative (SCRI)</u>.

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<u>Click here for more</u> <u>information on campus</u> <u>demonstration plots.</u>

Twitter









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## **Salt-tolerant Fine Fescue at Governor's Mansion**



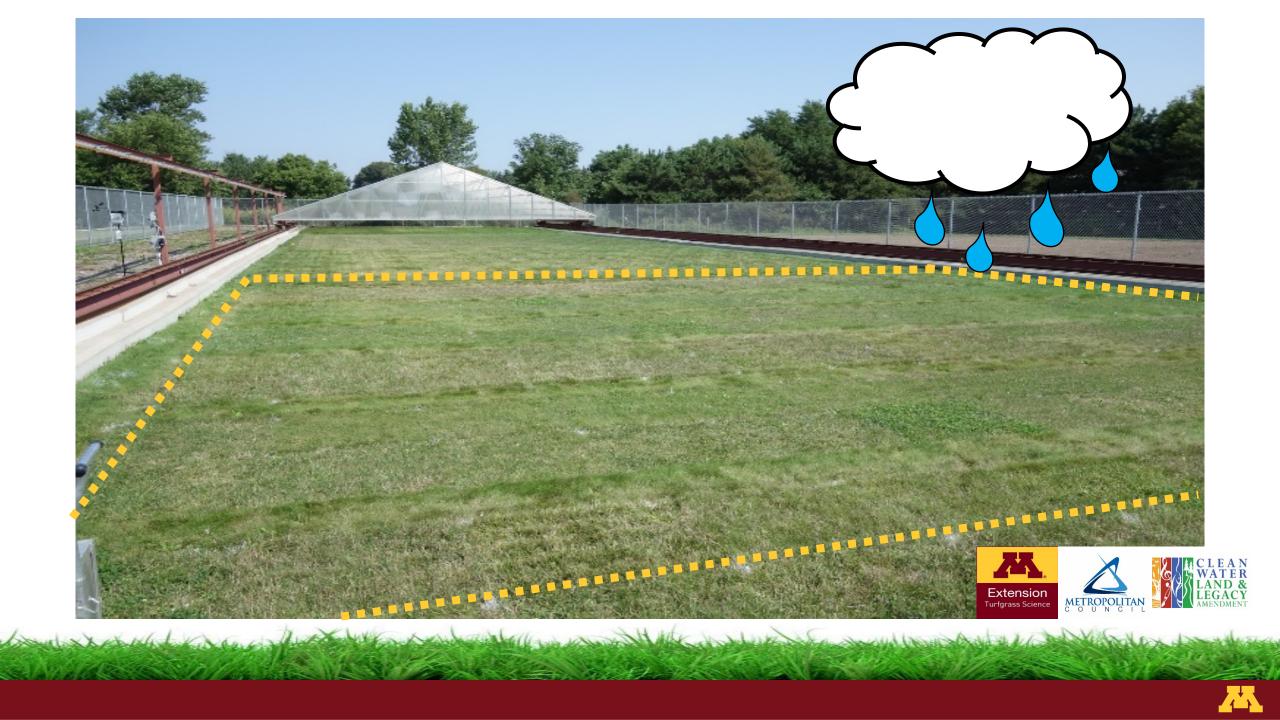
## **Consumer-available seed mixtures drought trial**

### Two-year research trial at UMN St. Paul campus TROE center

- 29 different seed mixtures containing various turfgrass species

   Kentucky bluegrass, Perennial Ryegrass, Tall Fescue, Fine Fescue,
   Annual Ryegrass, Rough Bluegrass, Alkaligrass
- Two mowing heights - 2.0-inches vs. 3.5-inches
- 60 days of drought (no irrigation or rain)
- 28 days of irrigation and/or rain (2x weekly)











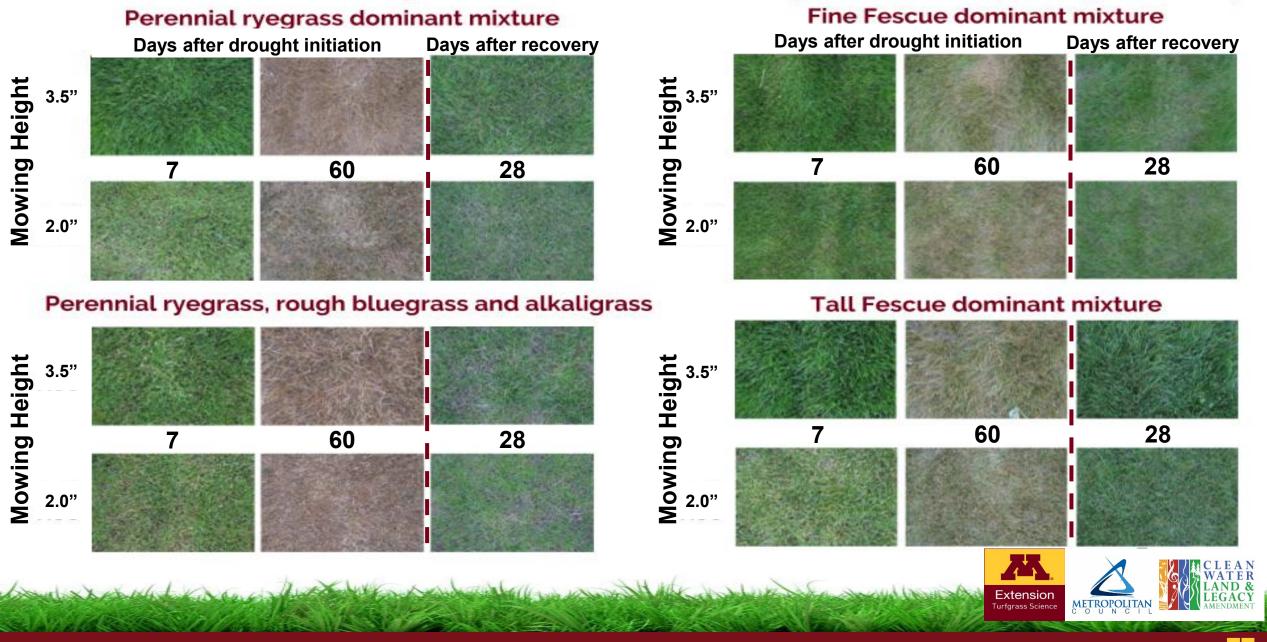
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#### Consumer-Available Turfgrass Mixtures under Drought Stress and during Recovery



## **Consumer-available seed mixtures drought trial**

### Two-year research trial at UMN St. Paul campus TROE center

- Mixtures containing high percentage of Tall Fescue, Fine Fescue, and / or Kentucky Bluegrass, mowed at higher mowing heights, performed better under drought stress.
- Mixtures containing higher percentage of Perennial Ryegrass, or Annual Ryegrass, or Rough bluegrass are less drought-resistant.
- All seed mixtures recovered after the 28-day recovery period



# Lawn water requirements

- Dependent on cultural practices
- Mowing (height & timing)
- Fertility (product & timing)
- Aerification/Cultivation (soil moisture, infiltration/drainage)



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- Pest Management (product & timing) extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden#lawns

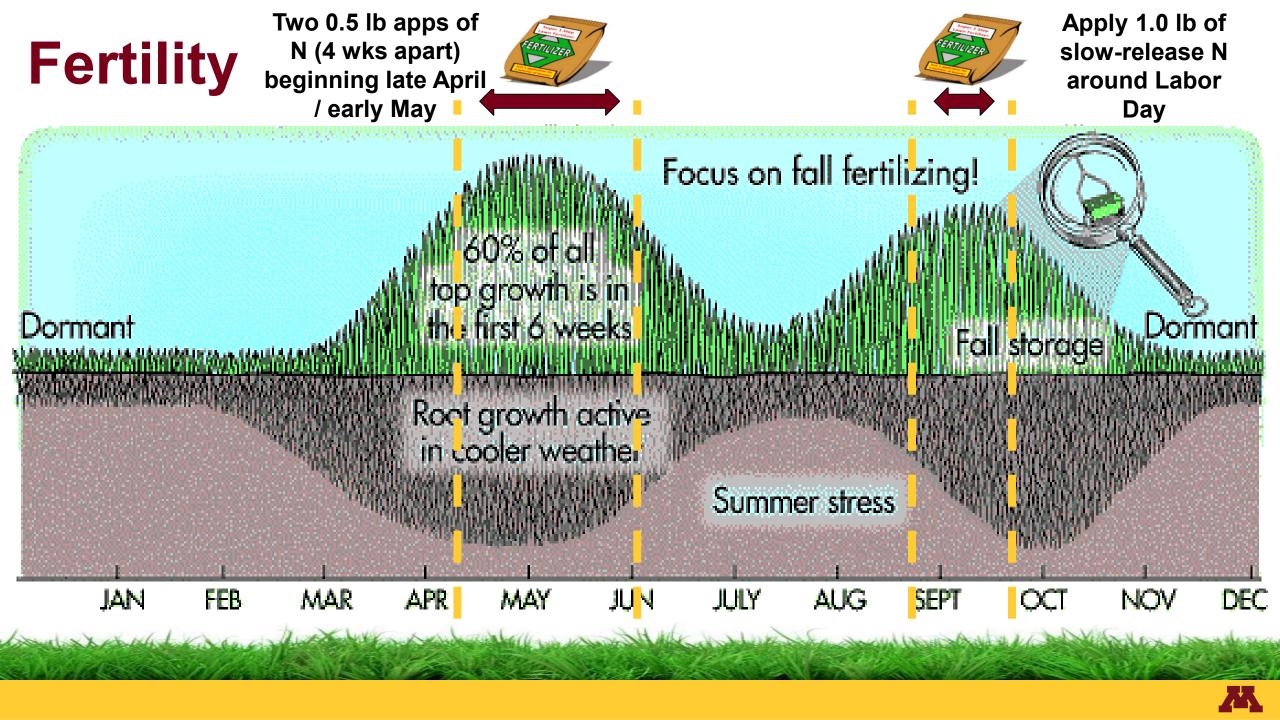
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### **Cutting Height and Lawn Health**



Adjust the mowing height for the season. Do not mow more than a third of the height of grass in one cut.

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# **Fertility**

Below is a table that outlines when and how much nitrogen is recommended for established lawns based on the amount of maintenance required for the lawn.

#### Nitrogen recommendations for established lawns

Maintenance level and practices		Total annual nitrogen to apply			Number and timing of applications
Soil organic matter	Low	Medium	High	Organic	
	High	maintenance			
Watered, clippings removed	4 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	3.5 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	3 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	2.5 lb N/1000 sq ft/ year	Four annual applications: Aug, Sept, early-Oct, May-June
Watered, clippings returned	3 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	2.5 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	2 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	1.5 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	Three annual applications: Aug, Sept, May-June
	Medium	maintenance			
Some watering, clippings removed	3 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	2.5 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	2 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	1.5 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	Three annual applications: Aug, Sept, May-June
Some watering, clippings returned	2 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	1.5 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ year	1 lb N/1000 sq ft/ year	0.5 lb N/1000 sq ft/ year	Two annual applications: Sept, May-June
	Low	maintenance			
No watering, clippings returned	1 lb N/1000 sq ft/ year	1 lb N/1000 sq ft/ year	0.5 lb N/1000 sq ft/	0.5 lb N/1000 sq ft/ year	One annual application: Sept



### Extension Turfgrass Science

#### extension.umn.edu/lawn-care/fertilizing-lawns

Soil organic matter levels: Low = less than 3.1%; Medium = 3.1 - 4.5%; High = 4.6 - 19%; Organic soils = more than 19%. If soil organic matter level is not known, guidelines for medium soil organic matter can be used. Assuming each application does not exceed 1 lb N/1,000 sq ft (for annual applications of 1.0 lb N or greater).

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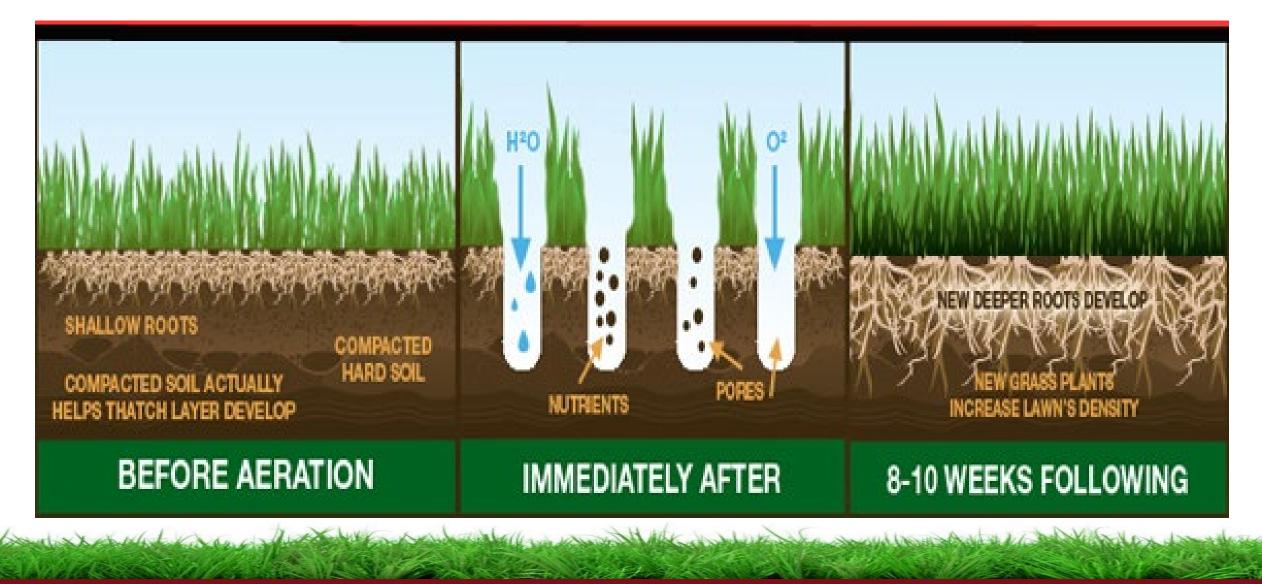
## **Cultivation (aerification)**



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# **Cultivation (aerification)**



# **Irrigation Timing**

How can I know when the soil moisture is low?

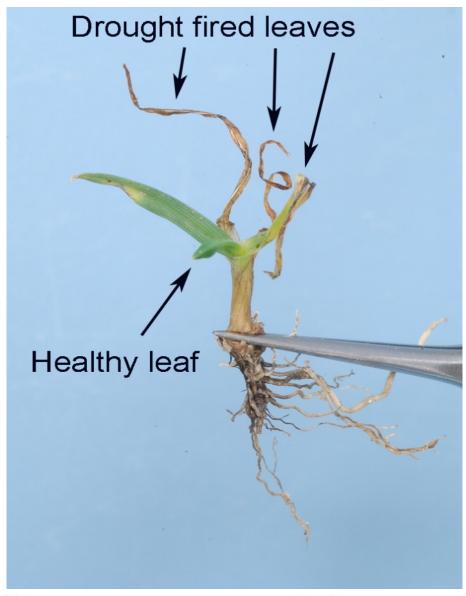
### Turf Wilting and Leaf Firing

- Leaves rolling / folding
- Tan / Brown leaves
- Visible foot-printing, tire tracks, bluish-gray coloring, screw driver test, ...
- Irrigation Sensors and Technologies

Little March and and the little way











# **Sprinkler System Components**

### Timer / Controller

- Old timers vs new timers (SMART)

irrigation.org/swat

### • Pipe & Valves (zones)

- Will be dependent on the number of zones in the system

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### Heads & nozzles

- sprays, rotors, multi-stream rotors
- Different application efficiencies
- Don't mix & match on the same zone!



## Rotors



## **Multi-stream Rotors**





- Inspect zones for leaking / broken and misaligned heads
- Try to do this during periods of low wind (e.g., early morning; < 6 mph) be sure to record / make note of wind speed.
- Uniformly lay out catch cups (graduated cups, tuna cans, etc.) in a grid pattern. Minimum of 20 cups/cans.
- Run irrigation system for 20 minutes minimum
  - Can run for < 20 mins (e.g., 10, 12, 15) but will potentially be less representative of realistic output

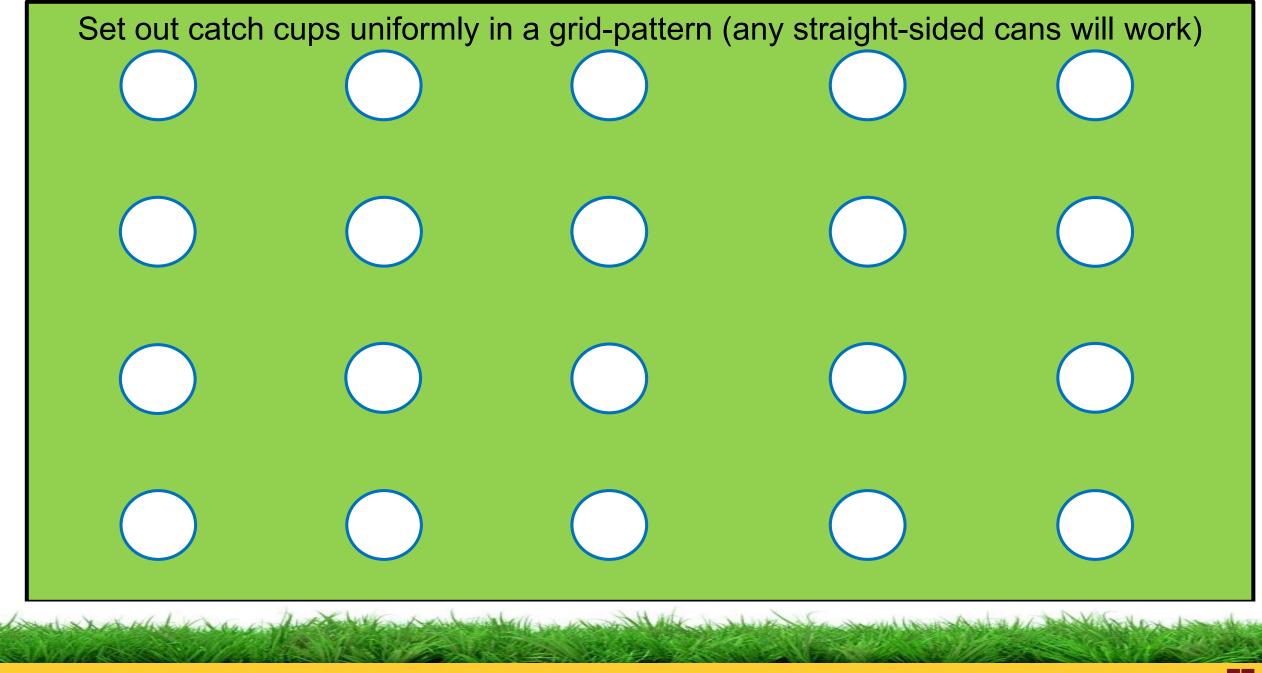
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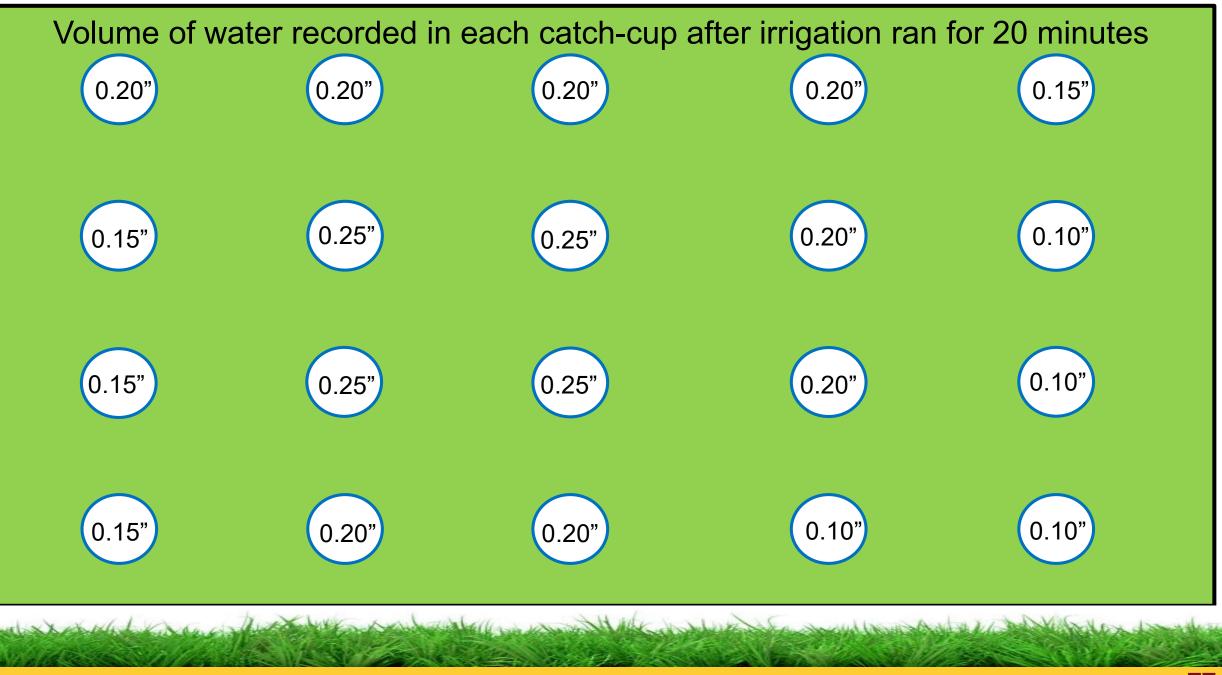


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#### **Calculating Precipitation Rate (in/hr)**

- Record the inches (volume) of water in each cup and calculate the average amount for all 20 cups
- Multiply the avg. amount by 3 (20 mins x 3 = 60 mins = 1 hour) to get precipitation rate

#### • Example (from previous slide):

- Total collected after 20 mins: 3.6 inches
- Average amount collected: 3.6 inches / 20 cups = 0.18 inches
- Zone precipitation rate: 0.18 × 3 = 0.54 in / hr (e.g., ~ 0.5 in per hour)

#### • RUNTIMES WILL DIFFER ZONE TO ZONE, AND PROPERTY TO PROPERTY

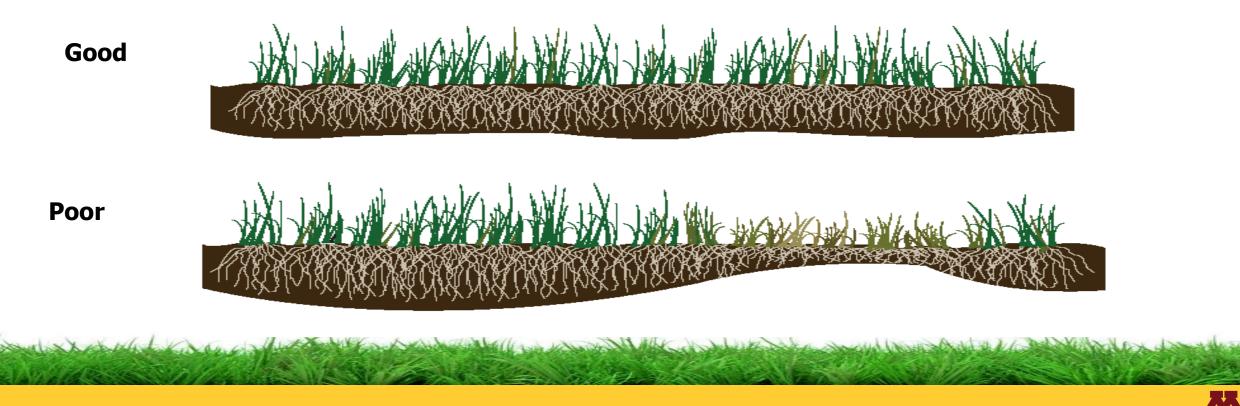
 Increase PR by adjusting/changing nozzles, increasing pipe size, adjusting head spacing, etc... Note wind conditions as well, may need to re-run audit

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### **Calculating Distribution Uniformity**

 Tells you if your system is over-watering or under-watering in certain areas of the zone



### **Calculating Distribution Uniformity**

- For uniformity calculations take the average depth from the lowest 25% of catch cups and divide that average by the overall average depth of all cans.
  - -Example from previous slide: Lowest Quarter collection = 0.10 inches
  - -0.11 inches / 0.18 inches = 61.1 % Distribution Uniformity

 Irrigation systems with lower than 60% uniformity should be adjusted for more uniform coverage

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#### Table 13.1. Turfgrass and landscape sprinkler system field audit performance rankings by distribution uniformity and sprinkler type<sup>a</sup>

Sprinkler type	Distribution uniformity (DU <sub>LQ</sub> ) and expected system performance						
(typical use)	Excellent (achievable)	Very good	Good (expected)	Fair	Poor (needs improvement)		
Multiple-stream gear and impact rotors (golf and large turfgrass areas)	85%	80%	75%	65%	55%		
Single-stream gear and impact rotors (medium-sized landscape and turfgrass areas)	75%	70%	65%	60%	50%		
Fixed-spray heads (small lawns and landscapes)	70%	65%	55%	50%	40%		

<sup>a</sup> Developed by Cal Poly Irrigation Training and Research Center at California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo. Funded by California Department of Water Resources and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Adapted from Walker et al. 1988.

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# Irrigation Volume (amount)

#### HOW TO BEST WATER YOUR LAWN Based on AgriLife's Recommended Landscape Practices. deep. shallow. deep, frequent frequent infrequent watering watering watering х

Different types of watering methods have a huge impact on the health of lawn root systems. Watering your yard deeply (about 1 inch) and infrequently (about once a week) produces a beautiful and healthy lawn that's more likely to withstand heat and drought.



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Provided by North Texas Municipal Water District. Visit WaterIQ.org for more info.

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## **Irrigation Timing**

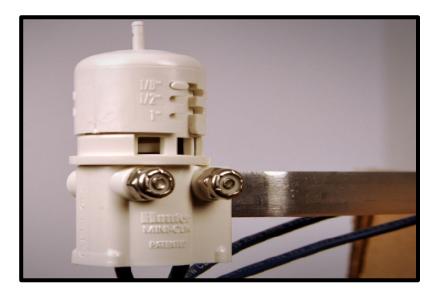
- 1-inch per week during drought period
  - Deep and infrequent
  - Two 0.5-inch applications (alt. three 0.33-inch apps)
- Cycle and Soak to prevent runoff
  - Heavy Loam and Clay soils
- Conduct Irrigation Audit to determine run-time
- Rain Sensors, Smart Controllers, Soil Moisture Sensors



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## **Rain Sensors**

- ~ \$20 to \$30
- Bypass irrigation
  - Shutoff sprinkler system immediately or
  - Rainfall threshold shutoff (precip. inches)
- Common RS use cork disks which swell upon wetting which triggers a signal to irrigation controller to bypass scheduled irrigation
- Ventilation window influences amount of time system remains in bypass mode







### **Rain Sensors**

 $\leftarrow \rightarrow C$   $\triangleq$  https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/103G.298

### Office of the Revisor of Statutes

Statutes Laws Rules Court Rules Constitution Revisor's Office - Search Law by Keyword



2018 Minnesota Statutes > WATER > Chapter 103G > Section 103G.298

◀ <u>103G.297</u>

### **2018 Minnesota Statutes**



#### **103G.298 LANDSCAPE IRRIGATION SYSTEMS.**

All automatically operated landscape irrigation systems shall have furnished and installed technology that inhibits or interrupts operation of the landscape irrigation system during periods of sufficient moisture. The technology must be adjustable either by the end user or the professional practitioner of landscape irrigation services.

History: <u>2003 c 44 s 1</u>

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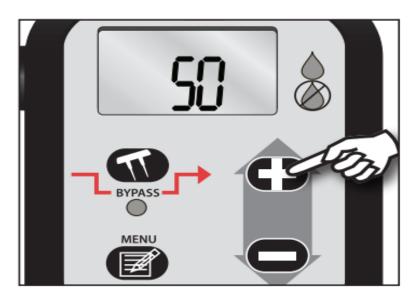
## **Soil Moisture Sensors**

- Continuously monitor soil water content
  - Bypass scheduled irrigation event
  - Estimates soil moisture (%) threshold
- Bypass irrigation when soil moisture (%) is above the moisture threshold
  - Default-calibrated or user-adjusted moisture threshold
- ~ \$120 to \$160



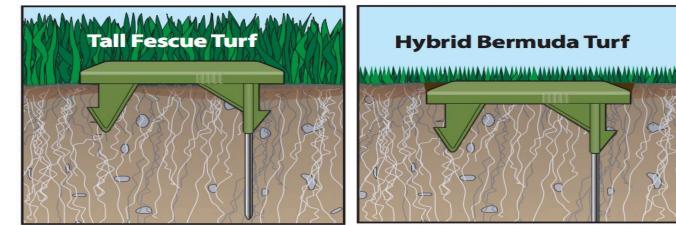








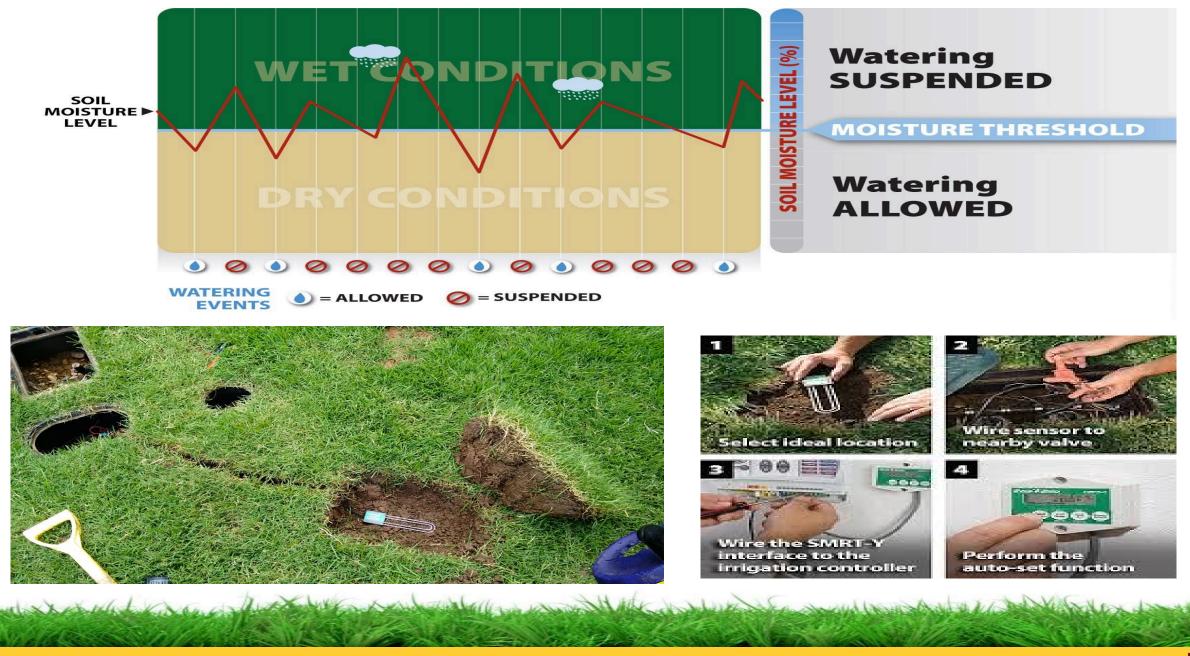
For close-cut turf varieties, such as Hybrid Bermuda, the top of the sensor must be installed at grade level to prevent damage by mowing equipment.



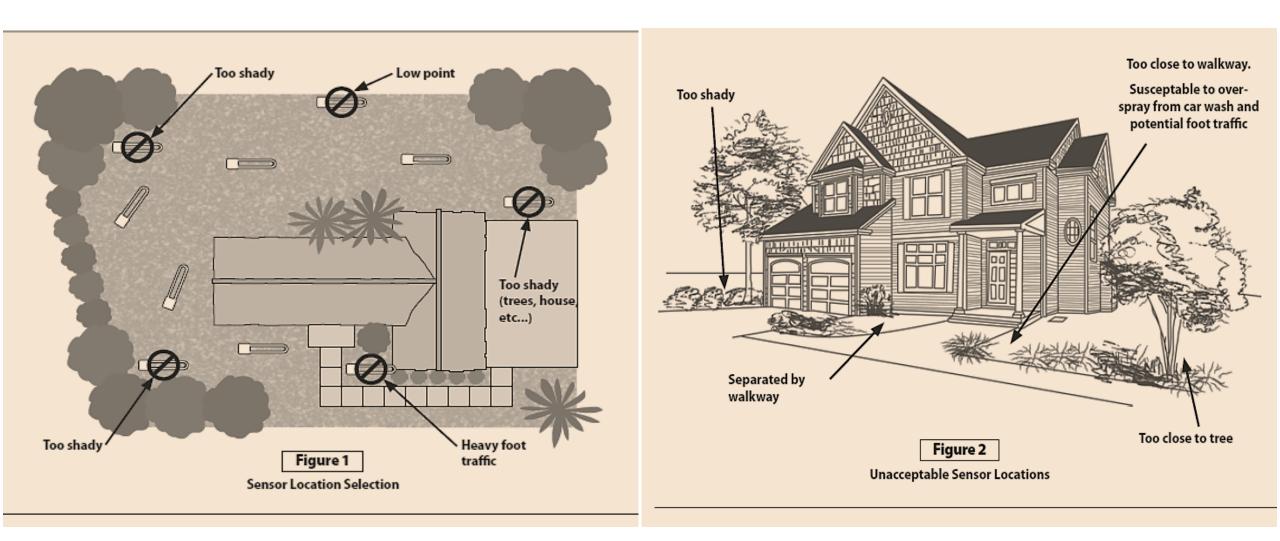
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Controller is OFF even though dial is in RUN position (user-interface reads 'Watering Suspended')



This controller Is connected to a Rain Bird Soil Moisture Sensor. Este Controlador está conectado con un Sensor de Humedad del Suelo de Rain Bird. Ce programmateur est connecté à la sonde d'humidité Rain Bird.



RAINABIRDO







(no sensor)



### Hypothetical Water Usage and Financial Return on Investment over 17 weeks (for 10,000 sq. ft lawn)

Irrigation sensor	Irrigation	Water saved	Irrigation cost†	Cost difference	ROI
	gal	gal	US\$	US\$	US\$
<b>No Sensor (Control)</b> (n=34) <b>‡</b>	105,975		461		
Rain Bird RSD-BEx (RS) (n=27; Avg. MSRP \$25)§	84,156	21,819	366	95	70
Hunter Mini-Clik (RS) (n=26; Avg. MSRP \$26)	81,039	24,936	353	108	82
Toro Precision Soil Sensor (SMS) (n=13; Avg. MSRP \$138)	40,520	65,455	176	285	147
Rain Bird SMRT-Y (SMS) (n=10; Avg. MSRP \$144)	31,169	74,806 🦯	136	325	181 🏒

+ Cost of water for irrigation within Fayetteville city limits is \$4.35 / 1,000 gallons. (City of Fayetteville, AR 72701)

**‡** n= represents average number of annual irrigation events allowed by the treatment during the three-year study.

**§** Average MSRP (US\$) among RS and SMS utilized in the study are obtained from Amazon.com (accessed 4 Dec. 2018). Prices may vary depending on supplier and/or website.



### **Smart Controllers**

- Large residential or Commercial properties
- Utilize weather station data from regional / nearby weather stations, or add-on weather stations (personal weather stations, airports, regional/USDA labs)
  - Adjust runtimes based on environmental conditions (i.e., ET)
- Many work with smartphones and utilize Wi-Fi

NAME AND COLONE

• Cost(s) dependent on number of zones



SkyDrop



Rachio

## **Smart Controllers**

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RAIN BIRD

#### TOTAL CONTROL FROM ANYWHERE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

 Controller and Mobi Device Not Includer

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Rain Bird LNK Wi-Fi Module + Rain Bird Smartphone App Smart Connect\* Plug-In Receiver



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Precision™ Soil Sens

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### HC Controller with Hydrawise<sup>™</sup> web-based software



Hunter Hydrawise + Hydrawise Smartphone App

SMRT Logic™Internet Gateway







**Eric Watkins** @erictwatkins · 10 Oct 2018 Turf students at UMN learning about smart irrigation technology from @RazorbackTurf

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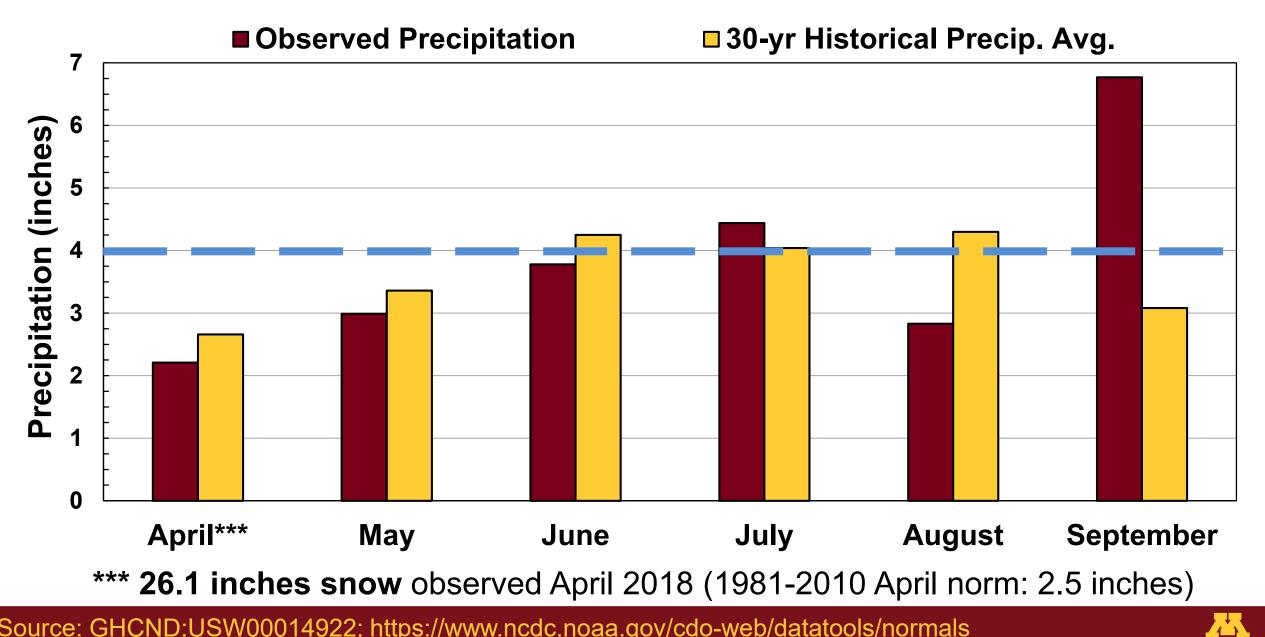
Irrigation Treatment	2017 Water Use <sup>†</sup>	Reduction	2018 Water Use <sup>‡</sup>	Reduction
	gallons (inches)	%	gallons (inches)	%
Control	12,962 (18.0)		14,323 (19.9)	
Hunter Hydrawise (smart controller)	8,732 (12.1)	33	10,305 (14.3)	28
Toro Evolution (smart controller - weather sensor)	5,160 (7.6)	60	7,855 (10.9)	45
Manual Irrigation	1,197 (1.7)	91	2,144 (3.0)	85
Hunter Soil-Clik (soil moisture sensor)	2,207 (3.1)	83	2,594 (3.6)	82

<sup>†</sup> 2017 trial ran from July 15<sup>th</sup> to October 19<sup>th</sup> (97 days). It is likely some irrigation ran that was unaccounted for and was not part of the scheduled program (such as following fertilizer applications or for demonstration purposes).

<sup>‡</sup> 2018 trial ran from 04 June to 05 October (124 days).



### **2018 Twin Cities Monthly Precipitation**



Source: GHCND:USW00014922; https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cdo-web/datatools/normals





### www.epa.gov/watersense





### WaterSense

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# Summary

- Water use is one of the biggest challenges facing consumers, utilities, government agencies, and the turfgrass industry
- Use of BMPs for water conservation will improve water-use efficiency
- Consider drought-resistant turfgrass species and proper cultural practices to reduce irrigation demands
- Upgrade to Soil Moisture Sensors and / or Smart Controllers

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- Audit Irrigation Systems Annually (spring) and keep sprinkler system 'OFF' until absolutely necessary.
- No Silver Bullet

## **Further Reading**

- Carrow (2006), Can we maintain turf to customers' satisfaction using less water? Agricultural Water Management. 80:117-131
- UF IFAS extension publications on ET (ABE343; AE459) and smart irrigation technologies & sensors (ABE325; AE437; AE446; and AE460)
- Kneebone, W.R., D.M. Kopec, and C.F. Mancino. 1992. Water requirements and irrigation. In D.V. Waddington, R.N. Carrow, and R.C. Shearman, editors, Turfgrass. Agron. Monogr. 32 Turfgrass. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, Madison, WI. p. 441-472.
- Leinauer, B. and D.A. Devitt. 2013. Irrigation science and technology. In: J.C. Stier, B.P. Horgan, and S.A. Bonos, editors, Agronomy Monograph 56 Turfgrass: Biology, Use, and Management. American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, Soil Science Society of America: Madison, WI. p. 1075-1131.
- Huang, B. 2008. Turfgrass water requirements and factors affecting water usage. In: J. B. Beard and M. P. Kenna, eds., Water quality and quantity issues for turfgrasses in urban landscapes. Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, Ames, IA. p. 193-204.

# QUESTIONS?

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