

# Why Is My Lawn Brown?

A COMBINATION OF HIGHER TEMPERATURES AND WATER RESTRICTIONS CAN TRIGGER GRASSES TO ENTER A NATURAL STATE OF DORMANCY.

Throughout the Colorado Front Range, homeowners and property managers are concerned about turf areas turning brown as a result of high temperatures and watering restrictions. Quite often, turf that is turning brown appears to be dying, but is actually only responding naturally to the drought by going into dormancy.

Cool-season grasses (bluegrasses, fescues) turn brown in response to high temperatures. These grasses grow best when temperatures are between 60 and 75 degrees. Higher temperatures trigger the natural response of the grasses to go into dormancy — a state of very little or no growth of the blades and very little metabolic activity. In dormancy, the grass is

concentrating on survival of the roots and crown, allowing it to survive very high temperatures and drought. When water is not restricted, frequent irrigation can force grass out of this dormant state.



TYPICALLY, AT LEAST 50 % OF WATER CONSUMED ANNUALLY BY HOUSEHOLDS IS USED OUTDOORS.

Due to the continuing drought and subsequent watering restrictions in Colorado, much research has been conducted to learn how well bluegrass can survive hot, dry conditions. According to turf specialists at Colorado State University, brown spots in a water-

restricted lawn can occasionally be caused by billbugs and white grubs. However, it is much more likely to be a response to high temperatures, restricted watering, or poor sprinkler coverage — causing a natural state of dormancy.

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Another problem may occur when the underlying soil is compacted, preventing water from penetrating into the root zone. When water does not penetrate deeply, grass roots will grow near the surface, creating a layer of thatch. Core aeration in the spring and fall will create holes in the compacted soil, allowing water and grass roots to penetrate more deeply.

Extensive research over the past three years has determined that well-maintained bluegrass lawns will recover when temperatures cool, and proper irrigation and fertilization are resumed in the fall.

Fescue lawns require a different approach. Fescue does not go dormant as completely as bluegrass.

During hot, dry conditions, fescue lawns need to be watered deeply, 6" – 8" into the root zone every 10 days to two weeks. Thinning of the turf area and death of the crown may result if sufficient water is not applied.

Remember, brown bluegrass in hot weather is not necessarily dead bluegrass. If the grass is managed properly and kept vigorous during the cool months (April, May, early June, September and October), it can survive extremely hot, dry periods in dormancy.

For more information on the proper management of turf grasses, and for a detailed fact sheet on "Summer Lawn Care in Colorado with Watering Restrictions," visit the Colorado State University website at <http://csuturf.colostate.edu/>.



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