

MiSustainable Holland

About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

Environmental Awareness/Action: Environmental education and integrating environmental practices into our planning will change negative outcomes of the past and improve our future.

Lovely lawns can mean costly wasted water

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A brown, crispy expanse of grass is not the cultural ideal for a lawn, but landscape irrigation is a massive use of water, especially during extended periods of hot and dry weather.

The [Holland BPW Water Treatment Plant](#) has a maximum treatment capacity of 38.5 million gallons per day, which is almost always enough to handle local usage (which averages around 13 million gallons per day), but in the summer there are a few days when the usage peaks at 30 million gallons a day.

So what, if the capacity gets stretched a few days a year? Well, the state mandates that if Holland BPW exceeds 90 percent of the state's threshold for the plant, Holland will have to begin looking into an expansion that would be very costly for the few days a year that it's needed.

Luckily, there is much that homeowners can do now to ensure we never have to deal with watering rules or expensive expansion with little benefit.

Reducing the amount of turf around your home is the most impactful change you can make. Homeowners should think critically about how much lawn they need for kids, pets, or outdoor living. Typical homes have a lot of unutilized yard space that can be converted to native plantings.

Not only does this reduce the lawn you need to care for, but this conversion supports pollinators, promotes healthy soils, reduces stormwater runoff, and more.

However, when you do need to keep some lawn to play fetch with Fido, here are tips to reduce the impact on water usage:

- Ideally, don't water your lawn. It will be green when the conditions are right and go dormant when there is drought.
- If you water, only water two to three times a week for about 20 minutes. This promotes deeper root systems and provides about an inch of water per week.
- If you have in-ground irrigation lines, get your sprinkler heads calibrated and maintained regularly by your lawn care company. Missing heads can waste massive amounts of water, and improperly positioned heads can pointlessly water the sidewalk.
- Get a rain gauge and watch the amount of precipitation falling at your home, then turn off your sprinkler system when you can. You can do this manually, or a lawn care company can connect an automated system to your sprinklers that adjusts your watering to the weather.
- Cut your grass tall, between 3 ½ to 4 inches. Most mowers have decks that will adjust this high. This controls weeds and grubs, and promotes stronger root systems. These stronger roots help the grass survive through a wider range of conditions.

Our community can shift our mindset on the lush, green lawn. Install native plants and let yard spaces go dormant where possible. We will see benefits even beyond water saved!

- *Lexie Kasper is the Land & Water Outreach Coordinator for the ODC Network.*