

Take the Tuna Can Test!

Did you know? During the summer, water consumption can more than double due to lawn and garden watering. People often ask: “How long should I water my lawn?” It’s difficult to give a precise answer, since every site has different environmental conditions, and output from sprinklers vary due to sprinkler nozzle types. You can do a “tuna can” test to determine how long you should water your lawn in your given situation.

1. Place eight flat-bottomed cans, such as tuna cans or pet food cans, or coffee mugs randomly throughout your lawn. Inexpensive rain gauges may also be used. Place some cans close to the sprinkler head and others several feet away.
2. Turn on your manual sprinkler or irrigation system for 15 minutes for rotary nozzles or 7 minutes for stationary nozzles.
3. Measure and record the depth of water in each can or mug with a ruler. Determine the average depth of water for all of the cans combined (see example below). Note the uniformity of your water application. If non-uniform, individual nozzles may need adjustment.
4. Refer to the example and lawn watering depth chart below to determine the number of minutes you should water each week. Record the times for future reference.



IMPORTANT: Watering routines should be influenced by the weather. Decrease watering time during cool or humid conditions and skip a scheduled watering after a moderate rainfall. Additionally, soil types impact watering techniques. Generally, clay soil requires the “cycle and soak” method which calls for more frequent but shorter sprinkling cycles with time in between to let the water slowly soak into the soil. For instance, a 30-minute cycle might consist of six (6) 5-minute cycles with 10 minutes between cycles.

Lawn Watering Depth Chart

Use the average depth in the cans and refer to the chart below to find out how long to water your landscape each week.

Average Depth in Test Cans (when watering 15 minutes with rotary nozzles or 7 minutes with stationary nozzles)		*Minutes to Water Once Each Week in:		
Inches	Millimeters	Spring	Summer	Fall
1/8	3.2	60	120	43
1/4	6.3	30	60	24
3/8	9.5	20	40	16
1/2	12.7	15	30	12
5/8	15.9	12	24	9.5
3/4	19.1	10	20	8
1	25.4	8	16	6.5
1-1/8	28.6	6	13	5

***NOTES:** When the sprinklers deliver less water during the period, then the watering length is longer. These are *weekly* watering times so when watering multiple times during the week, the individual watering times should add up to the total watering time. The chart assumes a best practice of application of approximately one inch per week during summer months.

EXAMPLE: *This is only an example. Determine your own watering minutes by using the table above.*

Can # 1	½ inch	12.7 mm
Can # 2	¼ inch	6.35 mm
Can # 3	½ inch	12.7 mm
Can #4	¼ inch	6.35 mm
TOTAL	1 ½ inches	38.10 mm
AVERAGE*	1.50/4 = 3/8 inch	38.10/4 = 9.52 mm
Minutes to water once a week in spring (see lawn watering depth chart)		20 minutes
Minutes to water once a week in summer (see lawn watering depth chart)		40 minutes
Minutes to water once a week in fall (see lawn watering depth chart)		16 minutes

*Average = Total depth of water in all cans divided by the total number of cans.

Visit www.waterstewardship.org for more useful water stewardship tips!

Some information in this document was adapted from the Washington Department of Health’s brochure “Water Conservation: Guidelines to Being Water Wise”.

