

## **Most homeowners can't correctly answer basic lawn questions**

When diagnosing a lawn problem over the phone, I need some basic information. Most homeowners struggle with providing this information.

First, I'll ask, "What type of grass do you have?" There's usually a pause followed by, "You know, it's, it's... oh (pause). What's that common grass?" To which I answer back, "Centipede... St. Augustine?" The caller then states, "Yes that's it, one of those (another pause). The caller asks, "Which one has runners?" "Both have runners," I respond.

It's also common to hear the caller yell to his/her spouse (after turning away from the phone), "Honey! What kind of grass do we have?" This is usually followed by a similar conversation as listed in the first example above.

"I have a Duke's mixture" is another common answer. I've come to understand what the caller means when this phrase is used. It's generally an older lawn that, with time, became a mixture of a little bit of the original grass combined with other grasses that moved in over the years such as common bermuda and bahia along with an assortment of weeds.

The starting point in correctly maintaining a lawn is to know specifically what type of grass you're maintaining.

Secondly, I ask, "How many square feet is your lawn?" Again, there's usually a pause followed by, "Well (another pause), I have a half acre lot and I usually buy enough fertilizer to cover a half acre." This is a big mistake. You need to subtract the area for the house, driveway, walkway, storage building, plant beds, etc. As a result of guessing, most homeowners apply three to four times the amount of fertilizer that they should have used.

You need to know the square footage of your lawn in order to correctly maintain it.

Thirdly, I ask, "How long does it take your irrigation system to apply ½ inch of water?" Following a pause, the typical response may be, "My irrigation system runs every other day and each zone runs for fifteen minutes." The caller seems proud to know this answer. By this time I'm ready to hang up. This sort of watering schedule is responsible for the demise of many lawns. Lawns need to be watered on an as needed basis.

You need to take time to do a simple, quick calibration exercise to determine how long it takes your irrigation system to apply ½ to ¾ inch of water.

Having the answers to these questions will help me help you. But more importantly, it will help you maintain a Florida lawn with less money and less frustrations.

To help answer these basic lawn care questions, contact your County UF/IFAS Extension Office or visit <http://yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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