

Are These Brown/Green Spots in My Lawn Caused by an Irrigation System Problem, Drought - or Something Else? (Draft 6; May 2009)

If you answer "YES" to 2 or more of the following, the brown or green spots in your lawn are most likely caused by an irrigation system problem: poor design, improper sprinkler spacing, operating pressure too high/too low, broken or plugged sprinkler heads, a malfunctioning irrigation clock, or station run time problems.

Understand that it is impossible for any irrigation system to provide perfect coverage. During extended dry periods (more than 7-10 consecutive days without rain during the summer), brown spots will begin to appear in all lawns.

1. There are GREEN spots, circles or "donuts" surrounding one or more of my sprinkler heads.



2. Some areas of the lawn are perfectly green and other areas are brown – even though all areas of the lawn are scheduled to receive the same amount of irrigation (at least according to how my irrigation controller is programmed).



5. Low spots in the lawn or areas at the bottom of slopes are greener than the rest of the lawn (or contain standing water after the lawn has been watered).
6. The upper part of slopes and/or the top of mounds appear brown while the rest of the lawn is green.
7. When the irrigation system is operating, I can see a swirling "cloud" of mist (atomized water droplets) above each head.



8. The lawn appears greener where buildings or trees create shade for at least half of the day.



9. I can see straight brown/tan lines on parts of the lawn; these lines are about the same distance apart as are the wheels on my lawnmower.



10. Many, if not all, neighboring lawns have brown areas similar to mine.
11. These brown spots in my lawn seem to occur in about the same place every year.
12. The “run times” (settings) on my irrigation control clock have not been changed this year (or ever).
13. I always irrigate my lawn “automatically”, using the existing settings on the irrigation controller; I rarely override the irrigation clock and operate it manually.
14. I installed the irrigation system myself, or know that it was installed by a non-professional (it was a DIY installation).
15. Even though I have brown areas in my lawn, I have other areas where there is standing water or the lawn is soggy following irrigation.
16. After placing identical containers (empty food cans, yoghurt containers, “official” irrigation catch-containers, etc.) on the lawn – a few in the brown areas and a few in the green areas – and running the irrigation system as scheduled, I find lesser amounts of water in the containers placed on the brown spots.



If you answer "NO" to 2 or more of the following your brown spots are likely to be irrigation- or drought-related.

1. I change the "run times" (how long my different stations run) on my irrigation control clock at least once during the growing season.
2. I have replaced or repaired (by myself or an irrigation specialist) some irrigation heads or spray nozzles at least once in the past 3 years.
3. I know what it means to have an "irrigation audit" performed on my irrigation system.
4. I have had an irrigation audit performed on my irrigation system at least once in the past 3 years.
5. My irrigation system runs during a time of the day when I can watch it operate.
6. I have watched all stations of my irrigation system run in the past year, checking for malfunctioning or broken heads.
7. Even though I have an automatic/in-ground irrigation system, I will use a hose and sprinkler to water dry spots in my lawn.
8. I have set my irrigation clock to cycle 2-4 start times (no longer than 5 minutes each), 1 to 2 hours apart to allow water to soak into the soil. For example: I have set my stations to water three times for 5 minutes, instead of each station running for 15 minutes all at once.