Hot Weather Lawn Care
by Debbie Lauer, Bell County Master Gardener

With the temperatures rising, it is time to think about some things that will help your turf grass survive the heat. There are several things that you can do to keep your grass healthy during this stressful time of the year.

The first thing is to make sure that the blade of your lawn mower is sharp. A dull blade will shred the tops of the grass as it cuts which causes grass to lose moisture faster than a clean cut would do. Take a look at the blades of your grass and see if you have a "fringed" effect on ends of your grass, if so sharpen the blade.

Another mowing tip is to raise the height of the mower blade during the hottest time of the year. This protects the crown of the grass and gives it and the roots some added insulation from the baking heat of the sun. For St. Augustine grass raise the mower blade to 3.5 inches high, for Bermuda and Zoysia grasses to 1.5 inches. Be sure to remember the "1/3 rule". Never cut off more than 1/3 of the actively growing blade of grass at a time.

Proper watering this time of year is crucial. Water infrequently, every 3 to 5 days if possible. Water deeply and slowly, to a depth of 6 inches. Water only when your grass tells you it needs water; if the blades are curling or footprints stay after it is walked on, it needs water. Your grass needs 1 to 2 inches per week this time of year. This must be applied slowly or the water will not absorb and will run off down the street. Run your sprinkler system through multiple cycles. Don't let any one station stay on any longer than 15 minutes at a time; our clay soils will not absorb water at a faster rate. Water early in the morning, finish before 1000 a.m. Do this for several reasons: because there is usually less wind to blow the water into the street, because it will be cooler and less will evaporate, and because the grass will dry quickly and be less susceptible to fungal diseases.

Watch for insect problems. If you have brown patches in your turf, check for chinch bug or grub infestations. If you turf is easily pulled from the ground look for grubs, they attack the roots. If you have more than 5 grubs per square foot treat for grubs. If the roots are still attached, look for chinch bugs by cutting off both ends of a coffee can and pounding it into the edge of a brown area and filling it with water. The chinch bugs will float to the top after ten minutes. Go to your local nurserymen or to "Aggie-Turf.tamu.edu "for recommended treatments.

Hold off on applying fertilizer. The stuff will encourage green growth that will require more water in a season where we should be conserving water. After the heat has abated, in September or October is the time to put down that last application of fertilizer to get the grass ready for winter. If you feel you must fertilize, use a slow release fertilizer or an organic fertilizer that will reduce the chances of burning your grass if over applied.