By now, the St. Augustine lawn should be scalped down to the lowest mowing level and the pre-emergent herbicides should have been applied and watered in. The scalping gets the lawn ready for good spring growth. Clean up all that dead grass (bag it for compost) because it inhibits the intake of watering. Dead grass causes water run-off instead of water penetration.

In the next 2 to 3 weeks, fertilize the lawn with a good fertilizer giving 1 # of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. feet. A good plant center will be able to advise you of this. Actually, 1# is all that’s required per year. Just follow the directions for calibrating the spreader. The phosphorous and potassium ratios are negligible in this area as these macronutrients aren’t required or already abundant in the soil. Please remember to add an iron supplement preferably in the chelated version. This minimizes chlorosis (a common problem with grass and plants in our area), which causes the leaves to turn yellow, and the veins remain green.

Watering is a science in itself. The basic rule-of-thumb is 1” of water per week. An easy way to measure is to set out empty tuna or cat food cans on the lawn and watering for 20 minutes. Add up all the water in the cans and divide by the number of cans measured i.e.: 10 cans at 2” = 20” Divide that by 10 cans = .2 " in 20 minutes x4 (for 60 minutes)=. 8”. This means you’d have to water 1 hour and about 10 minutes to get that 1” per week. Water one round at 35 minutes allowing the water to penetrate the soil, and then 35 minutes again. This is called watering deeply but infrequently and will ultimately save you money on the water bills. Deeper watering is also better to encourage root growth, which will then sustain plantings in drought conditions.

Short, shallow watering of a few minutes each causes the grass roots to remain close to the surface and remain vulnerable to wind and dryness. Watering deeply will thus cause the roots to grow down to search for the available ground water resulting in stronger, more deeply rooted grass. Also, in the coming months of no rain, don’t forget to deep water your trees and plantings in addition to the foundation of your house!

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com