



Even too much water can be bad

SMART WATERING CASE STUDY: NORMAN MCKENZIE, PRESTON DOWNS

“If we had known what we do now about water application and SMART irrigation a year ago we would have saved ourselves a whole lot of time and money,” says Norman McKenzie, owner of a property in Preston Downs in West Melton outside of Selwyn in Canterbury.

A year ago, Norman was told by his local council that he had to put lawn down on his new property to prevent dust blowing around the area. So he did just that, used a variety of spray on and hand seeding to lay a lawn.

It was November and Norman watered the lawn and did his best to keep the soil moist in what was fast becoming a very dry and windy summer season. When the lawn struggled to take, neighbours told him to “put as much water on as possible mate”.

But he was watering at the wrong time of year losing a battle against the elements of a strong sun and a gusty north westerly, and at the wrong time of day when the soil and grass was not ready to drink. His lawn died. Norman discovered that the reason it didn't survive was ironically due to overwatering; the water was not being absorbed properly and had suffocated the grass roots.

“We were fighting the harsh climate, wasting water and feeling guilty about it. And in the end the result was a disaster,” says Norman. “In fact, more water is often not the solution as we discovered. Now on our front section we have moss where the grass has spoiled, it basically drowned because the water was not applied properly.

“If we had known that we would get this result we would have done things very differently,” he says.

“We needed to plan our irrigation before we put in the lawn so the correct amount of water would go on at the right time of day.”

Norman has now sought advice from experts. He has been told to wait until the weather cools off after the summer then put in a ‘fine irrigation’ system which will water the grass gently at night when it is ready to drink.

“People need to be educated about the best way to get your garden and lawns to flourish in this harsh Canterbury climate. Maybe a booklet could be circulated with basic facts and ‘dos and don'ts’ to the community, that would have been very helpful for us who didn't know any different.

“Of course if you choose to live in a semi-rural setting you can't have picture perfect lush suburban grass, but there is a middle ground which can be found with correct and sustainable water management.

“We have put a wind break in our large back section, which is a bit like a football field, and the shade and protection that it has provided meant that we could put in veggie boxes. They are in partial shade but where warmth is trapped and out of the wind – and our veggies are flourishing. This means that growth is possible in dry and windy conditions, but it has to be done in the right way.”



Norman's lawn around his West Melton home

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