CENTRAL FLORIDA NEW SOD

New Lawn Watering Guide

Establishment watering for freshly installed sod — from install day to a lawn that can take care of itself.

A starting point — not a prescription.

Everything in this guide is a general baseline. Extra-hot drought weeks, heavy rain, deep shade, poorly draining soil, slopes, and your sprinkler system itself all change what your lawn needs. Expect to tune these numbers to your property — and lean on us when you're not sure.

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How New Sod Establishes

Your sod arrived with a small pad of roots — an inch or two of root zone cut from the farm. For the first couple of weeks, the entire job of watering is to keep that pad alive and constantly moist while it knits into your soil. Once it takes hold, the strategy flips: you water **deeper and less often**, so the roots have to chase moisture downward. That chase is what builds the deep, drought-tolerant root system a healthy lawn runs on.

That's why the depth targets in this guide start light and grow: **1/2"–3/4" per run during root establishment**, ramping to **3/4"** as the taper ends, and eventually **1" or more per run** on a mature schedule. Water sitting below a new root pad does nothing — depth is only useful once there are roots to chase it.

When to water

Week 1 runs at **4:00 AM and 4:00 PM**. From week 2 on, water **pre-dawn only** (2:00–6:00 AM) — the lawn drinks before the heat, and blades dry as the sun rises, which sharply cuts fungal risk. Avoid evening watering once sod has rooted.

Watering restrictions

Daily watering usually conflicts with local watering-day limits — but **new sod is typically exempt**. Most Central Florida utilities grant a new-landscape variance for **30–60 days** after install. Check with your utility or county so you're covered.

Why these numbers look different from our established-lawn guide. Our Central Florida Watering Guide recommends deeper applications (3/4"–1-1/2") for mature turf. New sod is a different animal: shallow roots can only use shallow water. Follow this guide until your lawn is established, then graduate to the main guide.

Never let the seams dry out. The edges and seams between sod pieces dry first and die first. If seams are curling, gapping, or browning, that section needs more water — today, by hand if necessary.

The Establishment Schedule

Week numbers start on install day. If the weather turns — a rainy week, a heat wave — shift with it (see Fine-Tuning); the schedule serves the lawn, not the other way around.

Week	Frequency	Depth per run	Notes
Week 1	Every day, **twice a day** 4:00 AM & 4:00 PM	1/2" – 3/4"	Keep the root pad constantly moist. Hand-water any seams or edges that dry out.
Week 2	Every day, once a day pre-dawn	1/2" – 3/4"	Roots are starting to knit into the soil. Keep moisture steady.
Week 3	4 days per week pre-dawn	ramp to 3/4"	Deepen each run as roots take hold — water starts pulling roots downward.
Week 4	2 days per week pre-dawn	3/4"	Transitioning to a mature schedule — deep and infrequent from here on.
Week 5 +	2 days per week pre-dawn	**1" minimum**, up to 1-1/2"	Your lawn wants roughly 3" of water a week in season. Drop to once a week only when rain is reliably making up the difference.

These runtimes aren't minutes yet. Depth targets only become zone runtimes after you calibrate — every system applies water at a different rate. The catch cup test on the next page converts inches into minutes for *your* zones.

Rain counts. A measured 3/4"+ rain event — at your property, not the forecast — replaces a scheduled run. Skip the next cycle, then resume. A $5 rain gauge makes this rule usable.

Calibrate Before You Trust Any Runtime

Every sprinkler system's output, distribution, and coverage is different. Head types, nozzle sizes, water pressure, spacing, and wear all change how much water actually lands on your grass — two identical controllers running identical minutes can apply wildly different depths. Until you measure, any runtime is a guess. Run the catch cup test on every zone **as soon as you can**.

The catch cup test

1. Set out **6+ straight-sided containers** (catch cups, tuna cans) across one zone — some near heads, some far, some in between.
2. Run that zone for **15 minutes**.
3. Measure the depth in each cup with a ruler and **average** them.
4. Multiply the average by 4 — that's your zone's **precipitation rate in inches per hour**.

Runtime (min) = target depth ÷ precip rate × 60.
Example: cups average 0.15" in 15 min → 0.6 in/hr.
For a 3/4" target: 0.75 ÷ 0.6 × 60 = **75 minutes**.

Cups should land within about 25% of each other. Big spread means a coverage problem — a tilted head, clogged nozzle, or pressure issue. Fix the coverage before tuning the schedule (or send us a photo).

Minutes lookup

Approximate — cycle-and-soak if you see runoff.

Rate (in/hr)	1/2"	3/4"	1"	1-1/2"
0.4 · MP rotator	75	115	150	225
0.6 · rotor	50	75	100	150
0.8	40	55	75	115
1.0	30	45	60	90
1.5 · spray	20	30	40	60

Cycle-and-soak: if water pools or runs off before the runtime finishes, split it into 2–3 shorter cycles with 20–30 minute soaks between (extra program start times on your controller do this).

Record each zone's rate and runtimes on the worksheet on the next page — it becomes the programming sheet for your controller.

Zone Calibration Worksheet

Run the catch cup test on each zone, then fill in a row. Runtime = target ÷ rate × 60, or use the lookup table on page 4. Keep this sheet by your controller.

Zone # & description	Precip rate (in/hr)	Min for 1/2"	Min for 3/4"	Min for 1"	Min for 1-1/2"	Notes
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						

Date tested: retest after any nozzle change, head repair, or pressure work — rates drift.

Cups vary more than ~25%? Note it here and call us — that zone has a coverage problem worth fixing before it costs you turf.

Fine-Tuning to Your Property

The schedule is the baseline; these conditions move you off it. Adjust **frequency** first — depth stays deep except where noted.

Extra-hot / drought ▲	Add a run per week before cutting anything else. Watch high spots and full-sun zones — they brown first.
Heavy rain ▼	A measured 3/4"+ event replaces a run. In a soaking week, pause entirely — soggy new sod rots faster than dry sod browns.
Heavy shade ▼	Shaded zones dry slower — cut **frequency**, not depth. Overwatered shade breeds fungus fast.
Poorly draining soil ▼	Clay-amended fill holds water. Back off frequency and cycle-and-soak every run — pooling water suffocates new roots.
Fast-draining sand ▲	Water moves through quickly — shorter, more frequent cycles during establishment; deepen once rooted.
Slopes	Gravity beats absorption. Aggressive cycle-and-soak — several short cycles so water soaks in instead of running off the high side.

Caring for New Sod While It Roots

Stay off it. Keep foot traffic, pets, and mowers off new sod for the first 2–3 weeks. Every step shears the baby roots you're trying to grow.

First mow: the tug test. Gently tug a corner of sod — when it resists, roots have taken (usually week 3–4). Mow high, with sharp blades, on a dry afternoon.

Watch the seams. Edges against driveways and beds dry fastest. Hand-water them in week 1–2 heat even when the system ran that morning.

Reading Your Lawn

Walk the lawn a few times a week. Don't assume brown means thirsty — overwatered and underwatered turf look surprisingly alike, and a drowning lawn is harder to save than a thirsty one.

Too much water

- Mushrooms, algae, or moss
- Soft, spongy soil underfoot
- Yellowing blades
- Circular brown-patch rings
- Constant runoff to the street

Not enough water

- Blue-gray or dull green color
- Footprints stay visible
- Folded or rolled blades
- Curling, gapping seams
- Crunchy, brittle feel underfoot

Something look off? Text us a photo.

Sooner is always better — a 30-second phone-camera diagnosis can save weeks of declining turf. Ask about our **every-other-month maintenance program** — a trained eye on your system before small issues become big ones.

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