

COASTAL GARDENER
Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.

Author’s Notes: Summer time is not only the period when all the hills on the Central Coast turn yellow, it is also the time when I see the lawns in many home landscapes turn yellow. Studies have shown that most turf grasses used on the Central Coast (Santa Maria area) transpire (use) about one-third of an inch of water per day during the summer months. If you live right on the coast (fog belt), water use will be slightly less, and if you reside at Lake Lopez or Garey/Sisquoc, your lawn is using about one-half inch of water per day. If you wish to keep your lawn green and growing, you need to adjust the watering time and frequency to supply adequate water to maintain the grass.

Some homeowners will say “My sprinkler system supplies that amount and still there are dry areas!” My reply is – even the best engineered sprinkler system will not apply the same amount of water to all parts of your lawn. Also the system does not take into account variations in soil composition in the yard. Therefore, to keep the turfgrass green, you must set the sprinkling time and frequency so the driest place in the yard gets adequate water. Setting the water schedule so the driest areas stay green will mean that some areas will be slightly overwatered. If some overwatering is not acceptable, then the dry areas will need to be given supplemental manual watering with a hose and sprinkle.

A second option is to convert your yard to a Mediterranean landscape (winter wet, summer dry). Plants used in this landscape will be species that can tolerate the dry Central Coast summers with no or very little supplemental summer watering. If you are interested in using drought-tolerant plants to make a minimum water use landscape, contact the Coastal Gardener. I have lists of grasses, ground covers, shrubs and trees that are suitable for use in a Mediterranean landscape.

Q: The leaves on my roses and bougainvillea are disappearing. Circle-shaped notches appear first in one area, and then the leaf gradually is all gone. I can find no worm or beetle causing the problem. Can you help?

A: The disappearing leaves are being cut and carried away by leafcutter bees. Leafcutters are small, solitary bees, which provision their nests with the leaf

material missing from your bushes and vines. The female packs her brood chamber with leaf discs, which the developing young will use for food.

Leafcutter bees are beneficial insects and are important pollinators for many plants. Therefore, I do not suggest trying to control them. If, however, they are destroying your plants, any good garden insecticide will cause the feeding to stop. I would suggest an insecticide with a repellent effect, as the smell will drive the bees away without killing them. Insecticides containing pyrethrins act in this manner.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**