

Gardening with Limited Water



Most of the water used at home is used outdoors, so even small steps to save water can yield big savings. Little things like fixing a broken sprinkler or making sure that you are running them in the cool of the early morning rather than the afternoon can save lots of water. You can conserve even more by shrinking the amount of lawn you have, planting water-efficient plants, installing a drip irrigation system or adding a weather-based smart controller.

Saving water is not hard. We simply need to be smart about using what we have. Low water use landscapes **can** be beautiful while using

minimal amounts of water. We will continue to add resources, so check back often.

10 Tips for Saving Water in the Home Landscape

1. Prioritize your plants Determine which plants are most susceptible to water stress. High on the list should be plants that are valuable in terms of replacement cost, prominence in the landscape and enjoyment.

- High Priority - trees and shrubs (especially those that are young and planted in an exposed site). Large, mature shade trees and shrubs can be left alone unless the drought is severe and the trees begin to wilt, or the root systems have been recently disturbed.
- Medium to high priority - perennials, fruit and nut trees, small fruits and vegetables; turf that is less than one year old.
- Low priority - annual flowers and herbs, ornamental grasses, established turf. These are usually less expensive and more easily replaced.

2. Irrigate early Less water loss occurs from evaporation and wind drift in the early morning hours because temperatures are cooler and there is less wind early in the day.

3. Know your soil The type of soil in your landscape largely determines how often you should water. Clay soils hold more water than sandier ones they can go longer between waterings than sandy soils.

4. Mulch Apply 2 to 4 inches of mulch around plants to keep weeds down, conserve soil moisture and moderate soil temperatures. Mulching minimizes water evaporation from the soil surface, reducing the need to irrigate. Keep mulch 3 to 4 inches away from the trunk or stem of the plant to prevent rot.

5. Control weeds Weeds can out-compete cultivated garden plants for water and nutrients.

6. Add organic matter When possible, add organic matter (compost) to your soil. This will improve the water-holding capacity during dry weather and promote good drainage during wet weather.

- 7. Don't fertilize** Or if you do, apply a low-nitrogen fertilizer. Fertilizing stimulates growth which increases water needs.
- 8. Avoid runoff** and puddling by cycling irrigations. Let sprinklers run for 10 minutes then shut them off for 10 minutes, allowing the water to absorb into the ground.
- 9. Use a broom** to clean driveways, sidewalks and steps. Using a hose to clean can waste hundreds of gallons of water.
- 10. Select water-efficient plants** When buying new plants, use some of the resources below to choose low water users adapted to our climate. Keep in mind that all plants require regular watering to become established, including California natives.

Resources

The resources below provide more information about how to create a water-efficient landscape and how to deal with drought conditions in your garden.

Landscapes

- Information from the UC Center for Landscape & Urban Horticulture about [landscape water management](#) includes questions and answers regarding water conservation and dealing with drought in the landscape.
- [Water Conservation Tips for the Home Lawn and Garden](#) is a UC ANR publication that describes how to reduce water use and at the same time have a lovely and enjoyable garden. (PDF 93kb)
- This chapter from the California Master Gardener Handbook discusses how to [keep various plantings alive](#) under drought conditions or water restrictions. (PDF 93kb)
- UC Davis Arboretum staff suggest actions to take for [landscape survival](#) during drought.
- UC environmental horticulturists offer tips on how to [save water in the garden](#) and landscape. (PDF 11kb)
- [Watering tips for drought conditions](#) from the University of Maryland offers suggestions for prioritizing the water needs of typical landscape plants, as well as watering and cultural tips for dealing with drought. (PDF 247kb)
- This Colorado State University information about [landscape management during drought](#) also applies to our California drought conditions (PDF 19kb).
- Help protect the health of your landscape trees with these tips for [pruning drought-stressed shade trees](#). (PDF 19kb)
- The Sacramento Tree Foundation offers tips on [caring for mature trees](#) during a drought and [caring for young trees](#) during a drought. Also see their website in the helpful sites listed below.
- [Rules of Thumb for Water-Wise Gardening](#) is a booklet produced by Regional Water Authority that offers suggestions for planning, planting and maintaining a water-efficient landscape. (PDF)

- From the California Department of Natural Resources is this colorful brochure that describes [six simple steps to a water-wise garden](#).
- [Water-Smart Landscapes](#) from the US EPA describes how to have a beautiful, healthy yard while using less water. (PDF)
- California's statewide program Save Our Water and the editors of Sunset magazine produced a helpful and beautifully illustrated 32-page booklet that offers many ways to [save water in your landscape](#). (PDF)

Water efficient plants

- A seven page document, the [WEL garden plant list](#) (PDF 106kb), lists the plants growing in the Water Efficient Landscape demonstration garden areas at the Fair Oaks Horticulture Center.
- This is a list of the [California native plants](#) growing in the Water Efficient Landscape at the Fair Oaks Horticulture Center (PDF 120kb). With minimal supplemental water these plants can be kept attractive all year.
- The [Arboretum All-Stars](#) are 100 easy to grow, water-efficient plants selected by the UC Davis Arboretum horticultural staff and tested in our region.

Vegetable gardens

- Suggestions for home [vegetable garden management](#) during a drought include valuable information on critical watering periods for numerous vegetable crops. (PDF 20kb)
- Some [vegetables require less water](#) than others; this article describes which ones to consider for your vegetable garden when water use is limited. (PDF 8kb)

Fruit trees

- This document describes the best ways to care for [fruit trees in a drought](#), with valuable tips on when and how to water and thin fruit (PDF 95kb).
- The UC Drought Management website is written for commercial growers, but the information on [drought strategies for peaches, plums and nectarines](#) is valuable for trees in home orchards as well.

Lawns

- This guide to [irrigating established lawns](#) from UC IPM Online describes how, when, and how often to water your turfgrass.
- Lawn [watering quick tips](#) from UC IPM Online, the UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program.

- [Managing Turfgrasses During Drought](#) is a comprehensive and detailed UC publication that addresses situations such as the ones we are currently facing. (PDF 421kb)

Graywater

- This chapter from the California Master Gardener Handbook discusses [graywater use](#) in urban California landscapes, including the benefits and risks of graywater systems. (PDF 67kb)

Irrigation

- [Irrigation scheduling](#) information for turfgrass from the UC Guide to Healthy Lawns tells how to determine the amount of water and how long to irrigate a lawn.
- UC Guide to Healthy Lawns guide to [irrigating established lawns](#) describes how to ensure that your lawn will thrive.
- [Plan your irrigation system](#) from UC IPM Online describes things consider when planning a watering scheme.

Helpful websites

- [UC Guide to Healthy Lawns](#) provides extensive information about growing a healthy lawn. From UC IPM Online, the UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program.
- The [Sacramento Tree Foundation](#) offers excellent in-depth tree planting and watering guidance for our area.
- [River-Friendly Landscaping](#) is an environmentally friendly way of gardening. RFL practices [conserve water](#), reduce yard waste, and prevent pollution of air and local rivers. Use the River Friendly [benefits calculator](#) to see how much water, time and money can be saved by creating a river-friendly landscape.
- [Water-Wise Gardening in the Gold Country Region](#) from the Regional Water Authority offers extensive information about garden design, plant selection, watering tips, and tours of gardens in the Sacramento area, including the [Water Efficient Landscape gardens](#) at the Fair Oaks Horticulture Center.
- Regional Water Authority provides comprehensive advice about [water smart gardening](#). [Find your water provider](#) by locating your property on their map, or simply enter your address and zip code.
- EcoLandscape California has just released eco-friendly landscape design plans for the [New California Landscape](#). Downloadable landscape and irrigation plans and documents are included, as are suggestions for plants that are low water users and climate-appropriate. In-depth plant profiles and photographs show how each plant looks during all four seasons.