



## Landscape Smart to Save Water



Good landscape design can help you maintain an attractive property, while minimizing the amount of supplemental irrigation you need.

**W**hen it comes to saving water outside, lawns are a primary target. For instance, with an estimated 25 million acres of lawn under cultivation in the United States, Americans collectively spent about \$22.7 billion dollars in 2001 on lawn care products and services (*American Landscape and Nursery Association*).

In a drought year, homeowners tend to use *more water*, not less, on lawns and outdoor landscaping. With less rainfall to keep lawns and gardens at their best, we rely more heavily on irrigation, placing added stress on already limited water supplies. There are a number of strategies, however, for maintaining and adjusting landscape practices to improve irrigation efficiency:

- Getting Beyond Green
- Design Smart
- Choose the Right Plants
- Reduce your Need for Supplemental Watering
- Limit the Use of Annuals That Need Daily Watering
- Use Mulch
- Improve Your Soil
- Accept Less Than Perfect
- Naturalize Part of Your Lawn To Reduce Water Use

### Getting Beyond Green

While many people enjoy the appearance of a lovely lawn, drought requires that we make priorities about what we value most. Can you tolerate less than perfect lawn this year for the sake of ensuring that water supplies are adequate for all user needs, as well as emergencies? Can you water less frequently and more efficiently so that the storage capacity of our reservoirs can begin to be recharged? Can you alter your landscape to incorporate plants that require minimal or no supplemental watering?

The collective impact of the day-to-day actions that each of us can take to conserve water can add up to significant water savings. Here are a few suggestions for saving water outside.



In selecting plants that are right for your site, you'll also need to note which areas are in full sun, or shaded, and which areas need to be irrigated.

## Design Smart

Good landscape design can help you maintain an attractive property, while minimizing the amount of supplemental irrigation you need. Start by making a simple sketch of your outdoor landscape, including buildings, lawn, garden, walkways, play areas, etc. Note any slopes, drainage problems, existing plants and trees, or other factors that will determine landscape needs. In selecting plants that are right for your site, you'll also need to note which areas are in full sun, or shaded, and which areas need to be irrigated.

Evaluate what you have. *Too much turf?* If your property is comprised of a sea of grass with few trees, shrubs, or garden areas, consider making a change in your landscape. A combination of lawn, landscaped areas, and natural areas creates greater interest and beauty. Greater plant diversity also results in greater wildlife diversity—so you can expect to see more songbirds at your feeders. Once established, a more diverse landscape requires less water.

## Choose the Right Plants

Some plants need a lot of water to thrive, while others are hardy and look good with little or no supplemental watering. By making smart decisions at your local nursery, you can save water and reduce your economic bottom-line.

Some of the best examples of plants that require less water are found in native prairies and meadows. These plants have adapted over thousands of years to thrive on little or erratic water input, and include coneflowers, blazingstars, coreopsis, black-eyed Susan, and asters, as well as many ornamental native grasses, including Indian grass, big bluestem, and little bluestem.

In the Southwest, a long list of native desert wildflowers, cacti, and shrubs are well adapted to dry conditions. A horticulturist at your local nursery should be able to advise you about drought tolerant plants that are best suited for your site.

## Reduce Your Need for Supplemental Watering

Select and group plants together according to their sunlight and water needs. Use your site plan to designate distinct zones, including:

- **Natural Zones-** Plants in these areas live on rainfall alone. Plants that are native to your area will be better adapted to your specific site conditions.
- **Low-Water Zones-** Plants in these areas will be able to survive primarily on rainfall, but sometimes may require a little additional watering in times of drought.
- **Moderate Water Zones-** These areas will require regular watering and should be limited to focal areas, such as entryway flower gardens, vegetable gardens, and functional lawn areas.

## Limit the Use of Annuals That Need Daily Watering

Hanging baskets, window boxes, and container gardens filled with annual flowers need almost daily watering. Perennials can go without water for much longer periods and may be a better choice in a drought year.



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## Use Mulch

Organic mulches help retain moisture, cool the soil, and reduce weed establishment when used in a 3"-5" (.07 meters to .12 meters) thick layer. Mulch landscaped beds, borders, and gardens at the beginning of the season.

## Improve Your Soil

Dig some compost into existing garden beds and add a generous amount of compost to new landscape beds and borders. Compost improves the structure of the soil, enabling sandy soils to better retain moisture and keeping clay soils from hardening and cracking during drought. Contact a compost supplier in your area or start a backyard compost pile to generate a steady supply.

## Accept Less Than Perfect

There's more to life than perfect grass. Many property owners never irrigate their lawns. During drought, it's normal for grass to go dormant (or "brown out"), but that doesn't mean the lawn is dead. Turfgrass is resilient and will turn green again with adequate moisture. Keep your mowing height high—about 2 ½ to 3 inches (.06 to .07 meters)—to help prevent the grass from being baked by the sun.

## Naturalize Part of Your Lawn to Reduce Water Use

Consider converting part of your lawn into a natural meadow. There may be a back corner of your property, a hard to maintain slope, or another area of your property suited for transformation from lawn to meadow or shrubby area. This is a terrific way to save water, reduce routine maintenance, and add habitat for birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.



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