

WATER USE EFFICIENCY IDEAS



*** IRRIGATION ***

Read your irrigation controller (timer) manual to understand its features. Learn how to adjust the controller and change the setting when plants need less water. Replace lost manuals – many can be downloaded from the manufacturer's website. You will need the model number of the controller.

Change the controller battery at least once a year to preserve the schedule in case of power failure. A power failure may cause the controller to revert to the default setting which will probably not water the correct amount.

Adjust the sprinklers so that they don't spray pavement, fence, and buildings.

Install a rain shut-off device.

Check for leaks, sprinkler head misalignments, broken pipes, and other system problems at least twice a month. If your automatic irrigation system normally runs at night or when you are unable to observe the system's operation, run the system manually for a short time during daytime. Repair with correct parts.

Observe for signs of irrigation system problems such as dry spots, ponding, erosion, and soggy spots. These indicate the system may need adjustment.

Clean filters in sprinkler heads and drip systems regularly.

Use sprinkler heads with matched precipitation rates; don't mix types of sprinklers on one line.

Allow for a five minute recovery between station run times to ensure adequate water pressure to operate the irrigation system.

*** WATERING ***

Keep a written record of last year's watering schedule near controller unit and use it to base this year's schedule. If you think the landscape needs less water than it received last year, shorten the run times, or lengthen the time interval (days) between run times.

Adjust Irrigation controllers with the seasons. For example, start out in spring with about 50% of the water that will be used in summer. Be sure to turn the controller down in fall and off (if possible) in winter. Use the water budget or seasonal adjust feature (%) on the controller to make adjusting easier.

Use low output sprinklers such as drip, soaker hoses, and microspray whenever possible.

Use "cycle and soak" or multiple run times on the sprinkler controller. Dividing the total watering time into shorter increments allows water to soak in. Set a goal of no runoff.

Water trees and shrubs less frequently than lawns, deep soak occasionally to promote deep rooting.

Check soil moisture below surface with a soil probe or large screwdriver. Don't assume the plants need water just because the soil surface looks dry.

Water only during the late afternoon, night and early mornings to minimize evaporation. Don't water when windy or raining.

Water shady areas less frequently.

Use a hose timer to shut off automatically when watering with a hose end sprinkler.

*** PLANTS ***

Prune only to rejuvenate and restore the health of the plant. If you must prune heavily to keep a plant small, consider replacing it with a plant that will mature at a smaller size.

Add compost to improve soil and mulch over garden beds to slow evaporation and reduce weeds.

Use balanced slow-release fertilizers. The nutrient content, found on the package, is a set of three numbers such as 10-10-10, 16-16-16, or 12-8-8. The numbers represent the percentage of Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium.

Design new landscapes with natives or ornamental plants from a similar climate. Consider renewing existing landscapes with water wise plants.

In dry weather, place a saucer under potted plants to hold water for plants to drink when soil dries out.

Replace "space-filler" lawns with rock gardens, mulched areas, or ground covers. Reduce lawn area to the size your family actually uses.

Use lower water-use grass types such as Hybrid Bermuda, St. Augustine grass and Dwarf Tall Fescues on new and rehabilitated lawns.

Use a higher setting to mow lawns so that the longer grass blades can shade the soil and roots. Remove the collection bag when mowing to grass cycle the clippings. Grass clippings will decompose quickly, returning nutrients that would otherwise be thrown away. Aerate lawns and remove thatch as necessary.

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*** HARDSCAPE ***

Sweep sidewalks, patios and driveways instead of hosing them down.

Use a bucket and automatic shut off sprayer when washing cars and boats or go to car wash the recycles wash water.

Use permeable paving wherever possible to allow rain to soak into the ground rather than run off.

Use Pool and spa covers to reduce evaporation.

*** COMMUNITY ***

Share ways to conserve water with family members.

Report leaks, broken pipes and out of adjustment sprinklers in common areas and parks to property association or the city.

Find out what conservation programs your local water agency or city may provide.

Consider attending community college, cooperative extension or adult education classes and workshops to learn better horticultural practices. Some water agencies offer landscape classes.

Use licensed and qualified landscapers and arborists for better quality work and healthier gardens. Look for professionals that advocate wise water use. Some professionals can help you develop an efficient irrigation schedule. Make sure the landscape professional you hire knows that wise water use is important to you.

