

## Smart Irrigation

By Rebecca Miller-Cripps

We have been lucky, in terms of water, in Tuolumne County in 2018. Late snow and rain in March and April helped offset a dry early winter. And temperatures have remained fairly mild so far this summer.

According to the Tuolumne Utilities District website: “Although groundwater appears to be an issue still facing residents in Tuolumne County, TUD’s surface water supply is exceptional this year and TUD is not currently facing drought restrictions.

Notwithstanding the current watershed conditions, TUD’s water supply outlook is dependent on weather conditions and fluctuates depending upon how those conditions affect the snowpack in the watershed. So, while the District’s water conditions outlook is presently favorable, it is susceptible to revision if the watershed experiences any long, warm and sustained dry periods this spring and summer.

The watershed upon which TUD relies resets itself each year and is entirely dependent on snowpack developing in the winter to supply water in the summer. The District encourages customers to use water wisely.”

The most important way to use water wisely is to recognize that, in California – with its dry summers – water conservation is a lifestyle. July is Smart Irrigation Month, for good reason. July is the month when the evaporation rate is highest in the foothills and the month when our plants typically use the most water.

The Irrigation Association uses the phrase “saved water is money in the bank” to draw attention to the need to water our landscapes and gardens, our golf courses and shopping center plantings more efficiently.

Celebrate “Smart Irrigation Month” by using some of the watering tips from the University of California Integrated Pest Management program, <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/>:

- Reduce your landscape’s need for water. Choose water-efficient plants and garden designs.
- Avoid planting turf species that require frequent watering, such as bluegrass or ryegrass. Try one of the new strains of buffalo grass that can be watered as little as twice a month.
- Water only when your lawn needs water. Water requirements vary according to turf species, location, and month of the year.
- Deeper, less frequent watering is best for most lawns. Water only two or three times per week.
- **Urban Drool is Not Cool.** Watch your sprinklers to be sure they’re not producing run-off. Adjust the direction of the sprinkler heads; replace broken heads and leaking valves.
- Cut back on fertilizer. Are you growing a grass “crop”? Or do you simply want a reasonably healthy lawn to provide some cooling play space? The more you fertilize the more water your plants require to maintain that excess growth.

- Many non-flowering trees and shrubs never require fertilizer. Only fertilize when necessary. Slow growth can be a benefit.
- And speaking of trees never wet the trunk of a tree when irrigating. Water deeply around the dripline. Most established trees and shrubs only need once-a-month watering.
- When you fertilize, apply only the fertilizer that's necessary. Purchase a simple soil test at your local garden supply or nursery. Excess nitrogen and phosphorus leach through the soil with watering and contaminate our local streams and lakes.
- Water early in the morning before sunlight increases evaporation and before breezes blow your precious water away.
- Mulch, mulch, mulch, mulch! A layer of mulch on the ground reduces evaporation, conserves water, and stabilizes soil temperature and crowds out weeds.
- Plant thickly. There's a reason Native Americans planted the three sisters of corn, beans and squash. Those large squash leaves shade the soil, conserving precious water and reducing evaporation.
- Improve watering efficiency and distribution by using drip irrigation and soaker hoses to take water only where it's needed.

For more information about irrigating and maintaining a healthy lawn, go to <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/TOOLS/TURF/> Join University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County for their Open Garden Day, Saturday, July 7, at the demonstration garden located at 251 S. Barretta St., Sonora. The garden opens at 10:00 a.m. with free demonstrations about "All Things Water" beginning at 10:30. Topics include Water Retention Facilities and Ponds, Swales and Wells. Information about rebates for WaterSense toilets and showerheads can be found at <https://tudwater.com/conservation/>

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*UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne County can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: [http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardeners/](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/) You can also find us on Facebook, or pick up the local Master Gardener book "Sharing the Knowledge: Gardening in the Mother Lode" at Mountain Books or the UCCE Office both in Sonora, CA.*