NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Water Conservation Tips for Home Gardens (August 27, 2022)

by Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardeners

Water is a precious commodity in California gardens. However, it is not necessary to sacrifice beauty and color in order to emphasize water conservation in the planning, planting, and maintenance of your garden. Here are some tips to reducing water use as you create a lovely and enjoyable garden.

Analyze your design and available space

Become familiar with your garden's microclimates – areas of sun, shade, wind exposure, heat, and cold – as well as its soil type, drainage patterns, slopes, high and low spots, and moisture sources. Remember that these areas may change with each season.

Prepare your soil

Determine your soil texture. The texture of the soil has a direct influence on water retention, drainage, and aeration. Sandy soil provides good aeration but allows water to drain rapidly. Clay soil retains more water, sometimes resulting in poor drainage and insufficient oxygen for plant roots. Loam soils are a mixture of sand, clay and silt articles and provide the best balance between water retention and adequate aeration.

Extremes in soil pH can be neutralized somewhat by the incorporation of generous quantities of organic matter like humus or compost, which also improve soil structure and water retention. In some cases, additions of sulfur or lime may be required to adjust the pH of the soil to an appropriate level.

Limit lawn areas

A lawn is almost always the single largest user of water in the home landscape. Many gardens have large expanses of turf that are never used but require considerable time, effort, and resources to maintain. Use turf only where it serves a purpose, such as in play or entertainment areas. Select water-efficient grass varieties, such a Bermuda, Zoysia, or buffalograss, which are suited to our local climate. Replace nonessential lawn areas with ground covers, mulches or permeable hardscapes such as decks, walkways, patios or dry creeks.

Put plants in the right places

Select low water use plants that are appropriate to our climate. Consider the use of California natives adapted to our climate zone. Most need regular watering until they are established but will require less water thereafter. For ease of irrigation, group plants with similar microclimatic needs in the same watering zone.

Limit the use of ornamentals that require frequent irrigation and group them in areas where they can be watered together. Productive garden areas, such as vegetable beds and fruit orchards may also require larger amounts of water than the surrounding landscape. Plant low-water users farther away from the house or where irrigation may not be as readily available.

Irrigate efficiently

Water only as much as is necessary and adjust your irrigation schedule periodically – each month, ideally – to reflect seasonal changes in temperature, wind, humidity, and rainfall. Your irrigation system should be customized to provide only as much water as is needed for each grouping of plants.

Extreme differences in microclimate areas require distinctly different irrigation regimens and should be irrigated with separate valves or systems. Use an efficient watering system such as drip or soaker hoses to minimize water loss through evaporation or runoff.

Turf is best irrigated with sprinklers. Infrequent, deep watering encourages deeper root growth and results in plants with greater tolerance of fluctuations in soil moisture.

Check your irrigation system regularly for leaks, broken heads, faulty valves, and other malfunctions. Be sure that misdirected water is not running off onto driveways, sidewalks, or streets.

Mulch, mulch, mulch
A thick layer (3 inches or more) of coarse mulch acts as insulation for your soil and significantly reduces evaporation of soil moisture. Mulching helps maintain a consistent soil temperature and protects roots from the heat and drying effects of summer weather. The soil under the mulch should be checked periodically to be sure that irrigation water is reaching the soil and the root zone of desired plants.

Appropriate maintenance
Heavy pruning can lead to excessive plant growth and increased demand for water.

The overuse of fertilizers results in rank growth and heavy water consumption. Apply nutrients only when plants need them and use low concentrations or slow-release formulations.

Mow lawns somewhat higher during very warm weather. This reduces the growth rate and the demand for water, promotes deeper root growth, and lessens the likelihood of sunburn injury. Taller turf shades the soil and reduces weed seed germination.

The Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions at a few select locations in the next few months!
Visalia Farmer's Market- 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears)
Hanford Farmer's Market – 4th Thursday – 5-9 pm
Ace Hardware, Visalia - 1st Sat./every month, 10 am-1 pm
Luis Nursery, Visalia - 2nd Sat./every month, 10 am-2 pm

Questions? Call us:
Call us: Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;
Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m
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