



How to Save Water in Your Garden (Water-Wise Part 2)
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The heat of the summer is upon us and will be for quite awhile, so how can a landscape survive this dry, scorching weather? For gardeners, plants are prized possessions and sometimes we overdo the attention paid to them, especially when it comes to watering – too much water has killed more plants than too little!

The amount of water present in soil is called the moisture content, and it must match the needs of each plant. Some plants such as ferns and azaleas need more moisture than do succulents and cacti, so the first rule in water-wise gardening is placing plants with like water needs together. For instance, it would not be a good idea to plant an azalea next to a succulent; depending on how much you water them, one or the other is not going to survive.

Adding organic matter to the soil is another strategy for saving water. Soil is essentially a collection of mineral particles of different sizes, and if most of the particles are large, like sand, water passes through rapidly. If most of the particles are small, like clay, water will penetrate the soil much more slowly. The solution for either problem is the same: Add organic matter in the form of compost, chopped-up leaves or composted manure. If at least an inch or two of organic matter is added each year, it will improve the texture and water-holding capacity of the soil.

Delivering water to a plant's root zone through drip irrigation is the preferred method of watering; 90% of water applied in this manner is actually available to your plants, as opposed to 40-50% from overhead sprinklers. Drip irrigation also minimizes evaporation loss and keeps areas between plants dry, which also helps limit weed growth.

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Organic mulches can cut water needs in half by blocking thirsty weeds and reducing evaporation. They also increase the humidity level around plants. Chopped or shredded leaves and organic compost in a 4- to 5-inch layer make excellent mulches; just be sure to keep any mulch material about 2 inches away from the plant crown so rot does not occur.

Choosing plants carefully for your landscape will mean less work for you in the long run. Varieties that are native to our area and those that do well in a Mediterranean climate like ours will adapt much better and require less maintenance than non-natives. For suggestions for waterwise plants that will thrive in our area, see our previous article on water-wise gardening in the June 24 Mountain Democrat.

It has been said many times before, but bears repeating: Lawns are among the thirstiest and most labor-intensive plantings in a landscape, and getting rid of them or, at the very least, decreasing their size, will go a long way in saving water. Consider planting low water-use groundcovers or perennials instead.

Finally, if you can, delay planting ANY new plants until fall – they won't need as much attention and will have a chance to establish good root systems before winter hits. They may not even need much irrigation in the beginning if rain comes a little early.

For more information on how you can conserve water in your garden, join Master Gardeners for a series of two online classes, July 15 and July 22, from 6:30 to 8:00 PM. Please use this link to register in advance for this meeting: <https://ucanr.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMkdu6hqzIpHdBgXqAkBU4kcBNyv93Z14nY>. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Currently we are in phase 2 resumption of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future be limited. Please see our calendar of events for learning opportunities. We realize our public classes are valued by County residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge.

We do have some good news--the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, is open to the public, from 9 AM to noon on Fridays and Saturdays. State and county public health guidelines require us to limit visitors to ten at a time (including our docents) and ask that they practice social distancing and wear face coverings. Restrooms will not be open. Check http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information.

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

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For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see <http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener> e-news.