

Save water, save money!!!

By George Frisch

Q. How do I get the most benefits and conserve the most water using a drip irrigation system in my garden.

A. Drip irrigation systems are designed to deliver a controlled amount of water to trees and plants in a garden. This system serves to water the plants without wasting water on unplanted areas, and reduces water lost through evaporation or runoff. Whatever drip system configuration you may have now or in the future, a couple of basic tips can help to make it more effective.

First, get out in your garden on occasion while your drip system is running and check it. See that there are no leaks in the lines. Check that emitters for watering trees and shrubs are still where they are supposed to be and are emitting water. Make sure that drip tape for watering closely spaced plants and row crops is still in place and not damaged. If you have a dog, check more often.

Second, conform the system and the watering schedule to the needs of the plants and not just to a program on the timer. Our drought tolerant Central Coast native ornamentals should not be watered in the summer, so they should not be on the same drip line as trees and shrubs that need summer watering. Large trees need more water than small trees which can usually be addressed by using the proper number of emitters for each size tree. Occasionally check the soil before a scheduled watering starts to make sure the soil is neither too dry or too wet, and adjust the watering schedule accordingly. You can test soil moisture with a long-bladed screwdriver. Insert the screwdriver blade into the ground. When you remove it, if the soil clinging to it is dry, it's time to water. If it is damp the first few inches but dry below, you'll need to water longer for deeper penetration. If the soil is overly moist, it's time to cut back on the water.

A well designed and maintained drip system can conserve water and save money. For a good description of drip system components and functions, see UC publication, [“DRIP: Watering the Home Garden.”](#) For a good and useful discussion of water management for the home garden, Google “UC Master Gardener Handbook” and check out Chapter 4 on “Water Management.”