

Drought and Your Garden – Tips

Tips for saving water in the home landscape.

First prioritize your plants. Determine which plants are most susceptible to water stress. High on the list should be plants that are valuable in terms of replacement cost, prominence in the garden and enjoyment. High priority plants are trees and shrubs. Large, mature trees and shrubs can be left alone unless the drought is severe and the trees begin to wilt. Medium priority plants include perennials, fruit trees, small fruits and vegetables. Low priority plants include annual flowers and herbs, ornamental grasses and turf.

Irrigate early in the day. Less water loss occurs from evaporation and wind drift because temperatures are cooler and there is less wind early in the day.

The type of soil in your landscape largely determines how often you should water. Clay soils hold more water than sandier ones and can go longer between watering. Most of our local soils are clay and/or compacted for housing.

Apply 2 to 4 inches of mulch around plants to keep weeds down, conserve soil moisture and temperature. Mulch minimizes water evaporation from the soil surface, reducing the need to irrigate.

Control the weeds. Weeds use precious water that should be saved for your garden plants.

When possible, add organic matter (compost) to your soil. This will improve the water-holding capacity during dry weather.

Fertilizing stimulates plant growth which increases water needs. Don't fertilize.

Avoid runoff by cycling irrigations. Let sprinklers run 10 minutes then shut it off for 10 minutes, allowing the ground to absorb the water. Then irrigate another 10 minutes. Remember concrete will not grow no matter how much you water it.

Use a broom or leaf blower to clean the driveways, sidewalks and steps. Using a hose to clean can waste hundreds of gallons of water.

When buying new plants, select low water users adapted to our climate. All plants require regular watering to become established, including California native.