

How not to waste it when watering your garden

A lot of water waste occurs in lawns and gardens during the hot, dry summer months, because many people aren't familiar with proper watering methods. Rather than haphazardly watering your plants, trees and shrubs, consider these tips to conserve water.

Only water when needed, and don't overwater—apply the amount of water needed by the plant. But how much water do plants need? Lawns need about an inch of water each week in the summer. Vegetable and perennial plants need between one and two inches, depending on the type and maturity of plant.

In general, plants need the most water in their early growth stages to help establish roots. This is relevant for seedlings as well as more mature transplants.

Adequate watering reduces transplant shock and helps the plant's roots become established in its new soil.

Healthy, established trees and shrubs shouldn't need much more water than that provided by rain and groundwater, except in drought situations. Ask your nursery how much weekly water they recommend for specific newly-planted trees and shrubs.

Measure weekly rainfall using a rain

gauge. Place one gauge in an open area and another under the trees, so you'll know how much water the different areas of your yard receive. If your lawn's rain gauge holds $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of rain this week, supplement it only with an additional $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Place the rain gauge in your sprinkler zone so you'll know when your sprinkler system has delivered the right amount of water.

Water at the right time to prevent evaporation and disease. The best time to water is in the early morning hours. Midday wind and sun cause water to evaporate quickly, and watering at night can increase plants' susceptibility to certain diseases.

Water thoroughly and deeply—once a week. Don't give plants small amounts of water several times a week, as this encourages

shallow roots.

Properly mulch your garden beds, shrubs and trees with two to three inches of mulch. Mulch helps keep the soil moist and prevents rapid evaporation. Compost is another great soil additive for improving soil quality and increasing its ability to retain water.

Use your sprinkler system's manual controls to water only when needed. If it's

set on an automatic watering schedule, it's likely that your plants will get more water than necessary. And make sure to keep water on your plants! Don't water your driveway or the sidewalk.

Soaker hoses and other low volume water methods such as drip irrigation waste much less water than sprinklers. Because they deliver water slowly, they reduce water loss due to evaporation and runoff. The plants are watered directly at their roots—sprinklers often disperse water where it isn't needed.

If you're in the process of planning your landscape, this is your chance to control how much watering you'll have to do. That's because you can plan now for conserving water by planting drought tolerant plants. You needn't fill your garden beds with cactuses, succulents, and desert plants, though; there are plenty of other plants that sip water instead of guzzling it.

For example, many types of conifers need less water, including Eastern red cedar, Eastern white pine and giant arborvitae. Several types of cotoneaster are drought resistant, as are many varieties of oak trees, including northern red oak, willow oak and white oak. Look into witch hazel, viburnum and flowering quince as well.

Another way to decrease watering needs

is to reduce the size of your lawn area. Plant garden beds, groundcovers, shrubs and trees instead. If possible, create garden paths from mulch, wood chips, stone dust or other water permeable materials. Patio areas made from with stone or pavers also reduce lawn space and can be much more unique than a lawn. In this way, you'll reduce your lawn size and your watering needs.

If you do plant grass, keep it isolated from your other plants. If you use a sprinkler system, your grass will be a separate irrigation zone, which will help conserve water. Make sure that you choose the right type of grass seed or sod for the site. In Rhode Island, the best types of grass for drought and heat resistance are fine and tall fescues, although some consider them coarse and unattractive. Kentucky bluegrass, the most common turfgrass used throughout New England, is moderately drought tolerant.

Grass should not be cut too short. It's easier for longer grass blades to keep the ground because it's easier for long blades of grass to keep the ground cool and slow evaporation. Keep your grass cut at a height of $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 inches.

Follow these tips and hopefully you'll waste less water and still have a beautiful and healthy lawn and garden!

