

# Water-Wise Gardening: lower your water bill and still have a productive garden

What are the two biggest users of water in your home? Toilets and gardens. In fact, during the summer, half of all household water usage can be for the lawn and garden. However, it's possible to dramatically reduce your water consumption, lower your water bill and still have a beautiful, productive garden. Just follow these eight steps:

## **1. Add organic matter to your soil.**

All soil is not created equal. Soil is essentially a collection of mineral particles of different sizes. If most of the particles are large (sand), water passes through rapidly. If most of the particles are small (clay), water will penetrate the soil much more slowly. The solution for either problem is the same: add organic matter. Organic matter, in the form of compost, chopped up leaves or composted manure will improve the texture and water-holding capacity of your soil. Add at least an inch of compost each year.

## **2. Deliver water to the root-zone.**

Drip irrigation minimizes evaporation loss and keeps the areas between plants dry, which also helps limit weed growth. Sprinklers can claim only a 40 to 50 % efficiency.

## **3. Use mulch to retain water.**

A 6-8" layer of organic mulch can cut water needs in half by blocking thirsty weeds and reducing evaporation. Organic mulches retain some water themselves and increase the humidity level around plants.

Organic mulches include chopped or shredded leaves, straw, compost, shredded newspaper, grass clippings. Inorganic mulches include Pro Weed Mat and a thin mulching film.

## **4. Use free water.**

Rainwater is the best choice for your plants. It's clear, unchlorinated and free. Install a rain water harvesting system to collect rain water from your roof tops. A 1,000 square foot roof will yield 2366 liters of water from one inch of rain.

## **5. Reduce your lawn.**

Lawn grass is one of the most thirsty and labor-intensive types of "gardens" you can have. Consider planting groundcovers or low-maintenance perennials instead. Be a Grower, Not a Mower.

## **6. Plan before you plant.**

By planning your garden before you plant, you can take advantage of the characteristics of your site, such as sun, shade, wind and soil. Group plants with similar water needs. Also consider how your plants will get the water they need. Will you need to carry water to demanding plants in a remote corner of your yard? Planning will save you time and energy down the road.

## **7. Choose plants carefully.**

A plant that's satisfied getting most of the water it needs from natural rainfall will require a lot less work from you. For drought-tolerant perennials, choose varieties that are native or from a region with a similar climate. These plants will have adapted to your climate and soils.

## **8. Take care of your plants.**

Healthy plants need less water, fertilizer and pest controls than stressed plants. By keeping on top of tasks — such as weeding, thinning, pruning and monitoring pests — you'll water less frequently.

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