



# Water Conservation

What can we do to help conserve water without letting everything in our yards die from thirst? You'd be surprised by how much water we can save without sacrificing our yards and gardens to the heat. A little wisdom, a few new techniques, and just some good common sense can mean the difference between beating the drought conditions and watching everything turn brown and die.

Now, back to water conservation. First, start conserving now. The longer we wait to conserve, the less water we'll have in July and August, when we need it most. Yes, the rivers, streams, and canals seem to have plenty of water in them right now, but that will change quickly as it gets hotter this summer. Use a blower or a broom to clean sidewalks and driveways instead of the hose. Water in the evening or in the morning instead of in the daytime, and for longer periods of time less frequently. This prevents moisture loss to evaporation and will allow the water to penetrate deeper into your soil.

Second, only give your lawn what it needs. Many gardeners overwater their lawns and in so doing, do a disservice to both the community and to their lawns. A healthy, well-maintained lawn requires 1 to 1 1/2 inches of water per week. This works best when applied in two applications of 1/2 to 3/4 inches per week. How do you know how long to water to get 1/2 inch? Measure it. Put cylindrical containers (I like tuna cans best) out around your yard and after a normal watering measure how much water has accumulated in each can. If you collect only 1/4 inch in 30 minutes, you'd better increase the length of watering, not the frequency. This method works especially well if you have shares or turns and can only water once or twice each week. When the heat of summer comes and the top 2-3 inches of soil dries out, your grass will thank you when its deep roots can find the cool moisture hiding about 5-6 inches below the surface.

Third, use Soil Activator or humate. All I need to say is it increases your soil's ability to absorb and hold moisture by 500-700%. If you don't believe me, give it a try. When lawns start burning up this summer because of the lack of water, those gardeners who have used humate on their lawns and gardens will definitely notice the difference. A few years back, when they had that record drought combined with 60+ days of 100 degree heat in Texas, many homeowners in that state used humate to keep their lawns alive when they could only water once every 2 weeks. I've used it on my lawn for years and I'm still amazed at what it does in some of my "trouble" spots around the yard.

Fourth, plant water tolerant plants when possible. All plants need water, but some require less than others after becoming established. I won't be out tearing up my lawn and planting cactus anytime soon, but a move toward planting more native and less water-demanding plants in our valley would be an excellent step. Local garden centers in the valley, who understand our unusual climate, can help you decide which plants will work best in the locations that you have chosen, and which ones need more or less water than others. You don't have to plant only sagebrush and junipers to have a less water-demanding yard; you'd be surprised what attractive and beautiful plants don't need as much water as we want to give them.

Finally, use soaker hoses and drip systems when possible. You won't believe how much less water you'll use to get the same results. These devices will distribute 50-70% less water than a sprinkler, yet still water more effectively. Drip systems use a series of flexible tubes and small emitters that slowly drip the water in a controlled area, such as at the base of a shrub or tree, or even in a container on a deck. Although the drip system uses a fraction of the water that sprinklers do, the water is directed at the soil and right to the intended plant, and they are simple and easy to set up and install. In many cases they can be worked into an existing sprinkler system easily.

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Soakers work in a slightly different fashion. The biggest difference is that soakers cover a larger area than drip emitters but still use much less water than sprinklers by targeting the soil around the plants. Where a drip system has a small hose that waters each individual plant, a soaker hose can water multiple plants. Poly pipe or regular garden hose distributes the water from the source to soaker hoses placed in strategic locations around plants. The best systems incorporate both the soakers and drip emitters into the landscape or gardens depending on the needs of the plants and plant placement. The one thing that people are happy about is how little water it takes to do the same job their sprinklers did last year.