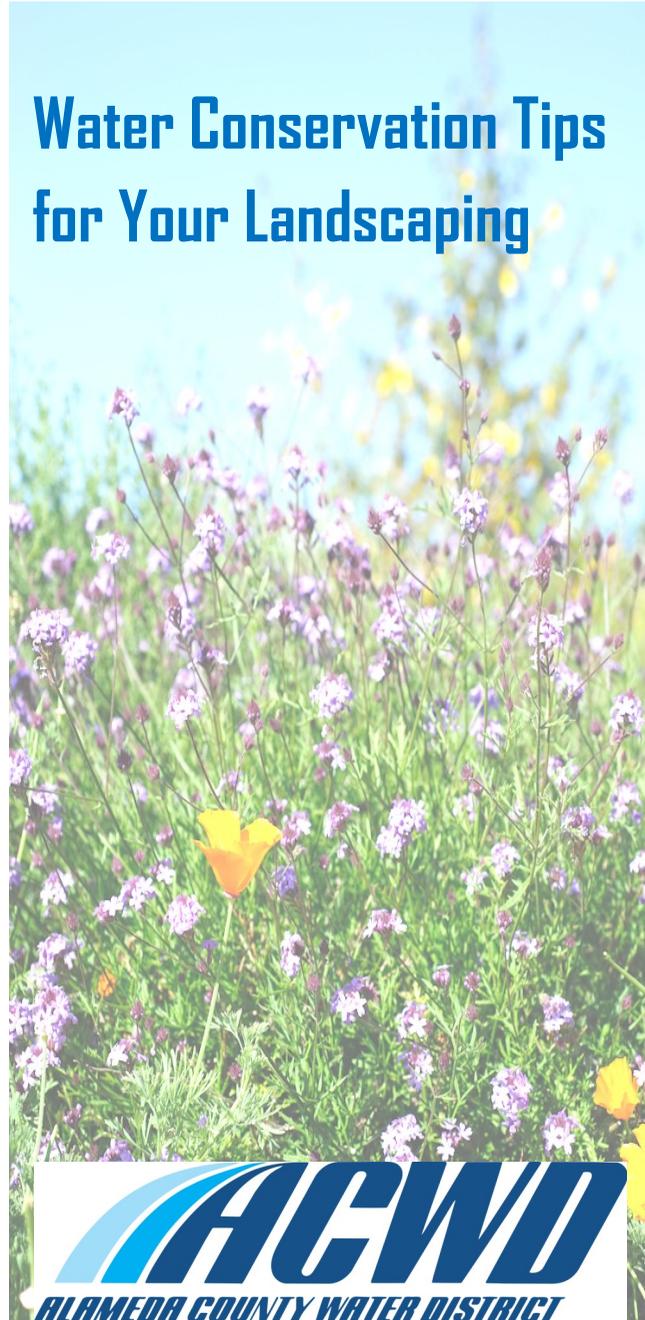


Water Conservation Tips for Your Landscaping



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Other Water Conservation Techniques:

Mulch

Mulch keeps moisture in the soil (reducing water needs), protects plants from some soil borne diseases, decomposes over time which feeds the soil, prevents erosion and compaction, and reduces weed growth. Mulch should be applied in a 2-3 inch thick layer around plants, but kept 6-12 inches away from tree trunks. There are many mulch varieties including organic and inorganic.

Learn More: Rescapeca.org/publications, search for "mulch guide."

Compost

Compost improves soil structure, increases nutrient content, and wards off plant diseases. Improved soil structure (greater spaces between particles) resists compaction which increases the soil's ability to hold water. Fertile soil also has far greater moisture retention. Add a thick layer of compost over the soil to prepare areas for planting. You don't need to work it in, let the soil critters do the work for you.

Learn More: www.calrecycle.ca.gov, search for "home compost."

Sheet Mulching

Sheet mulching around your plants and vegetables goes a step further than just applying mulch. It suppresses weed

growth, composts weeds in place, improves the soil's water and nutrient retention, encourages favorable soil microbial activity and worms, enhances the soil's structure, and improves plant vigor and health.

Learn More: www.lawntogarden.org

Aeration

Aerating the ground (making small holes throughout the landscaped area) allows water to seep in more effectively. Most landscape maintenance contractors recommend aerating lawn areas once per year, but during a dry spell they recommend doing it more often (every 4-6 weeks). You can also top dress the lawn with compost after aeration to get more nutrients into the soil.

Learn More: uccemg.com, search for "aeration."

Drip Irrigation

Irrigating plants with drip means that the water goes straight to the root zone, where it is needed. The root zone remains moist but rarely waterlogged, creating a balance of water and air around roots for optimum growth. It also reduces root stress from flooding and drying cycles. Studies show that drip irrigation can save up to 70 percent of applied water compared with a sprinkler system.

Learn More: ucanr.edu, search for "drip irrigation."

Watering Techniques

Did you know deep, infrequent watering of plants creates a stronger root system that is more likely to survive a dry spell? The best time to irrigate is in the evening or early morning, between 6:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m., to minimize evaporation. How do you know when plants need water? Squeeze the soil in your hand; if it sticks together, it is moist and should not be irrigated. Maintain a 2-3-inch layer of organic mulch around trees, shrubs and other plants. This will reduce water evaporation from the soil, improve soil condition and keep the soil cool when temperatures soar.

Please be aware of these common water waste situations and try to avoid them:

- Runoff when irrigating with potable water
- Using outdoor irrigation during and within 48 hours following significant rainfall
- Using potable water to irrigate ornamental turf on public street medians
- Using potable water in decorative water features that do not recirculate the water

Perennials

Perennials with gray or silver foliage are often more water-efficient. Water established plants only when "really" needed and only when they begin to wilt. When water is limited, many perennials and woody plants may wilt a little but will survive.

Fruits and Vegetables

Set up a drip system for your edible plants as this provides localized watering with less evaporation. Use a timer to control when they are watered, and check soil moisture regularly to ensure you are watering the correct amount.



Potted Plants

Before watering, check the moisture of your potted plants by sticking a finger into the soil down to the second knuckle. If it feels dry, your plants need water. A great way to conserve water while watering potted plants is to catch the water from your shower in a bucket or straight into your watering can while you wait for the water to warm up. Put a dish under your pots to prevent runoff, and occasionally break up the top few inches of soil to improve water absorption.



Trees & Shrubs

In the summer, young trees can be watered twice per week (about 5 gallons) and mature trees once per week. During dry spells, water directly with a hose or 5-gallon bucket. Water the "drip zone" area directly beneath the foliage and shaded by the tree. Add mulch to lower soil temperatures and reduce water evaporation. Deep watering assists with deep root growth, which leads to healthier trees.

Lawn

Use a "cycle and soak" method. Run your irrigation system until you start to see signs of run-off. Then turn it off, let it soak for an hour, and repeat this process 2-3 times. Make sure to note the time it takes for the water to run-off. Anything applied beyond this time during a single watering event is wasted.

Adjust your lawn mower to a higher setting to leave the lawn blades longer. This allows the grass to focus on growing a strong root system instead of growing new grass blades. Taller grasses also reduce evaporation and weed growth. Instead of throwing lawn clippings away, leave them on the lawn. They will reduce water evaporation and provide valuable nutrients to the grass and soil. This means less fertilizer will be needed to maintain a healthy lawn.

Special Plants

Some plants, like roses, require special care. During dry spells, build a berm around the base of the root ball to direct the water toward the plant. If needed, provide additional water with a bucket of water collected from washing vegetables for dinner.

Landscape Care

Do not use a leaf blower to clean out shrub beds and other planting areas. This common mistake will remove mulch and topsoil, exposing the plants. Actively growing plants use more water, so limit use of fertilizers, which can damage already stressed root systems. Avoid pruning and trimming plants during the summer since this stimulates growth and water demand.

Learn more at: University of California Master Gardener Program - cagardenweb.ucanr.edu and University of California Cooperative Extension, Alameda County

