

# CONSERVING WATER OUTDOORS



**OUTDOOR WATER USE** can account for more than 30 percent of total home water use.

Texans must use their precious water resources more efficiently, especially during droughts and hot Texas summers. Much of the water used outdoors is wasted through inefficient landscape watering practices. By reducing the amount of water we waste, we can save water, save money, and protect the quality of life of current and future Texans.

## WATER-WISE CONSERVATION STEPS

Many Texas water utilities charge higher rates during the summer or increase rates in increments based on use. Reducing your outdoor water use by following these steps can produce substantial savings in your water bill:

- 💧 Determine how much water your landscape needs to stay healthy.
- 💧 Use water-efficient landscape practices, such as proper mowing, mulching, and moderate fertilizing.
- 💧 Design a water-efficient landscape by planting drought-tolerant grass and choosing plants that are native or well adapted to the climate conditions in your area.

## WATER-WISE LANDSCAPE

### How often should I water?

It depends! Keep in mind the factors that influence the water needs of your landscape such as soil type and depth, sun exposure, and plant selection.

Thorough but infrequent watering will help grass and shrubs develop deep roots. It is especially important to start this during the spring when root growth is at its peak.

Over-watered turf will have a short root system and will not be drought tolerant. By slowly adjusting to successively longer periods between waterings, the turf can grow deeper roots and become more drought tolerant.

### What time of day should I water?

Early in the morning is best. Otherwise, the water can evaporate between the sprinkler and grass before reaching the ground and even from the soil after the water soaks in.

## What should I water?

Only your plants. Don't water the sidewalks and drive-ways. Use a broom to sweep debris away.

## How can I use rainwater?

Harvest it. Funnel the water from your gutters into a barrel or cistern and save it for a sunny day. Rainwater is free and better for your plants because it doesn't contain hard minerals.

# WATER-WISE LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

## When should I mow?

Only when the grass is dry. And don't cut more than one-third of its length at one time. Taller grass holds moisture better, encourages deeper root growth, and is less susceptible to browning. Keep grass about 3 inches tall during the summer (taller than 3 inches stresses the grass).

## What should I do with my grass clippings?

Mulch or compost them. Better yet, leave them on the lawn. Grass clippings can break down quickly and provide valuable nutrients.

## How can I conserve soil moisture?

Use a lot of mulch. It will make your shrubs, trees, and flower beds more tolerant to the scorching Texas heat.

Mulch applied to the landscape can

- 💧 retain moisture,
- 💧 reduce runoff,
- 💧 help moderate soil temperatures,
- 💧 aid in root development,
- 💧 reduce erosion,
- 💧 slow weed growth,
- 💧 prevent soil compaction, and

- 💧 make your landscape beautiful.

Place mulch directly on the soil or weed barrier fabric that can “breathe.” Avoid using sheet plastic in planting areas.

Apply a thin layer of compost to the lawn. It functions like mulch, increases organic content, and protects grass roots.

### **What should I know about fertilizing?**

Apply fertilizer in the spring and fall. It helps develop good root systems to keep your grass more drought tolerant.

Don't overuse fertilizer, because it can run off and pollute local waterways. Too much fertilizer will also increase the grass' need for water. Contact your county AgriLife Extension agent or local nursery professional for a soil kit and fertilizer recommendations.

### **How else can I improve my landscape?**

High quality soil helps reduce irrigation needs by retaining water better. Unless the soil is damaged or depleted, native and well-adapted plants may not require imported soil. Aerate the lawn once a year, and weed the lawn and garden as needed. Weeds rob other plants of valuable water.

If the soil is rocky, sandy, shallow, heavy clay, or has little organic matter, consider using raised planting beds. They are simple to install and can add interest and beauty to your landscape.

### **How else can I minimize water use?**

Don't forget your pools, spas, and fountains.

- 💧 Cover pools and spas when not in use to lessen evaporation.
- 💧 Backwash your filter only as necessary.
- 💧 Turn off decorative fountains on windy days and during drought.

## DESIGN A WATER-WISE LANDSCAPE

Put drought-tolerant groundcover instead of grass in areas that are narrow, small, sloping, oddly shaped, or close to pavement. Limit turf areas to those needed for practical uses.

Plant water-efficient, well-adapted, and/or native shrubs and trees. Bermuda, buffalo, and zoysia are drought-tolerant grasses.

Choose plants that are drought tolerant (or at least have low water requirements) and heat tolerant and can survive the minimum winter temperatures in your local area. Native plants are also more resistant to diseases and pests.

Contact your county AgriLife Extension agent, your water-wise landscape professional, or your water supplier for recommendations of water-efficient plants that are adapted to your area of the state and additional information on water-wise landscaping.



## **WATER-WISE IRRIGATION EQUIPMENT**

### **What is the most efficient irrigation system for nonturf areas?**

Drip irrigation. It is the most efficient method of watering bedded plants, trees, or shrubs. Soaker hoses are an easy and inexpensive alternative to drip irrigation.

### **What type of sprinkler should I use for the lawn?**

One that produces large drops of water close to the ground. Don't use a sprinkler that produces a mist or fine spray. Use a timer so you don't forget to turn the sprinkler off.

### **How should I manage my automatic sprinkler system for water efficiency?**

Adjust the settings as needed. Don't just set the system in the spring and leave it on all season. Some controllers turn off the system when a measured amount of water is used, and rain shut-off devices prevent watering in the rain.

Not all plants have the same watering requirements. Reduce the run time of sprinklers on shrubs that may not need as much water as grass. Shady areas may not need as much water either. Contact a professional landscape irrigation specialist for a maintenance check.

### **What maintenance is required for my automatic sprinkler system?**

Check sprinkler heads regularly. Remove dirt or debris that may be clogging the nozzle, and make sure the heads are working at the proper pressure and not leaking.

Repair or replace broken heads, valves, seals, and pipes. Once a month, run the sprinklers for a short time on each cycle while you are at home to make sure they are working properly.

## What features should I look for in an automatic sprinkler system?

Options that will help you save water. The controller of new sprinkler systems should have these features:

- 💧 A multiple scheduling option
- 💧 A rain shut-off device
- 💧 A water budget feature (which allows percentage adjustments without having to reprogram)
- 💧 Test functions



Visit the following website for  
additional information:  
[www.epa.gov/watersense](http://www.epa.gov/watersense)

# Texas Water Development Board

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