

Outdoor Water Conservation

As the summer months approach, we think about water. Lots of water... like, swimming in pools, washing our cars, watering our gardens and running our sprinklers. But, did you ever stop to think that summer is a time when our region's water supply is most strained and resources are limited?

As much as we all love summer, it's important that we conserve our water resources during these hot, dry months by using water wisely. So, what can you do? Well it's easy. Consider this, about 32% of a household's total yearly water bill goes to watering during the summer months. A large part of this may simply be the result of overwatering – something that can be controlled. With a few tips, you can not only save water but save money too!

Consider these outdoor water-saving tips:

- **Water Wisely**: Watering thoroughly, but infrequently, will produce a deep-rooted lawn that is more water-efficient and drought tolerant. A good rule of thumb is: "*one inch of water a week*" to maintain a healthy lawn during the summer months.

Water-wise Tips: Over-watering causes 75% of turf problems. Read our "Water One Inch Per Week" article to find out how much you are watering.

Water-wise Facts: You can save 750 –1500 gallons per month of water by watering your lawn only when it needs it. If your lawn springs back when you step on it, there's no need to water it. Also, by watering early in the morning or late in the evenings you can slow the evaporation process and save 300 gallons of water per month!

- **Mowing**: Keep grass 1 to 3" long. Grass this length shades the roots, requires less water and mowing and allows the root system to become deeper and more efficient in water storage.

Water-Wise Tip: Set mower blades one notch higher than normal since longer grass means less evaporation. This can save you 500 –1500 gallons of water per month!

- **Ground Cover**: Turf requires more maintenance than other plants. So, it is important to evaluate your lawn and see where grass is practical and functional. Since lawn is the highest water user in the landscape, keep it small and save water and money. Where foot traffic is infrequent or where slopes are steep, consider ground covers or low-water use plants. Consider planting drought resistant native trees, plants and grasses.

Water-wise Fact: Native and low water use plants look beautiful and save water. If you plant less grass and more shrubs that are suited to our climate, you can save between 750 – 1500 gallons of water per month!

- **Mulches**: Adding compost or mulch to your soil will ensure that your soil holds the right amount of water by keeping the soil covered and cooled, thereby minimizing

evaporation. Organic mulches include manure, compost and bark chips. Add generous amounts of soil amendments to the soil before planting. Your plants will love you for it!

Water –wise Tip: Avoid using inorganic mulches such as rocks and gravel as these will actually re-radiate the sun’s heat and can increase the amount of water that surrounding plants will need.

Water-wise Fact: To maintain proper moisture and minimize evaporation, remember not to water on those windy days. You will save yourself 200 –300 gallons each time.

- **Sidewalks and Driveways:** Remember to sweep your driveway and walkway of debris and not rinse with a garden hose. After all, it’s good exercise and it will save you 150 gallons or more of water!

Water-wise Tip: Let children play with the garden hose while watering the lawn only. This will save you 600 gallons of water per hour! Remember to put “shut-off” nozzles on all your hoses.

- **Swimming Pools:** If you have a pool, use a cover to slow evaporation. It will keep your pool cleaner and reduce the need to add chemicals.

Water-wise Fact: A pool cover will maintain your pools beauty and save you 11,300 gallons of water per month!

- **Irrigation:** Consider using drip irrigation or soaker hoses for gardens and shrubs. These systems apply water directly to the plant roots, thereby reducing waste from evaporation or run-off. Be sure to check your irrigation system periodically for leaks and broken sprinkler heads. Misaligned or broken sprinkler heads and runoff are some of the biggest causes of water waste.

Water-wise Tip: If you reduce your watering on cool, overcast or rainy days and adjust your automatic sprinklers, you can save between 200 –300 gallons of water each time!

- **Large Landscapes:** Consider using an EPA Certified Smart irrigation Controller. These controllers use local weather conditions to monitor the amount of water lost to evaporation by the sun, and the amount of water transpired by the plants. The controller then sets the watering time to deliver only that amount of water. Smart Controller systems use up to 50 percent less water than standard irrigation systems.

Water-wise Tip: For more information on EPA Water Smart Controllers and other outdoor water conservation items, go to our web site at: www.conserveh2o.org.

- **Automobiles:** Wash your car and other things such as bikes, trash cans and even the dog (!) on the lawns so the grass can get a drink.

Water-wise Tip: Use a bucket of water to wash the car and quick rinse. Don’t let the water run. This will save you 150 gallons of water!

Water-wise Fact: Washing a car for 20 minutes can use up to 100 gallons of water! Remember, if you use a hose, be sure it has a shut-off nozzle on it. Better yet, take your car to a car wash that recycles and reuses the water.