

Water Wise



DROUGHT LANDSCAPE TIPS

MULCH: One of the most effective ways to reduce soil evaporation is to apply a layer of mulch. Even if there isn't much moisture in the ground, a 3 inch layer of an organic (bark, straw, hay) or inorganic (rock) on top of the soil over the root zone of the plant will help keep roots cool and keep moisture in the ground. The City of Sierra Vista has a terrific compost center that sells inexpensive mulch. Call the Public Works Department at (520) 458-5775. Check your city for compost availability.

ASSESS YOUR LANDSCAPE: What are the thirstiest plants? What are the plants you can replace? What are the plants you definitely do not want to lose? Trees are usually the first plants to save because they are the plants with the greatest time investment. Depending on the water needs of the tree, it can go drought dormant if it is suited to semi- arid climates. If it is a high water plant (fruit tree) you may have to haul in water. Shade cloth for small plants will help reduce evaporation loss.

WATER RIGHT: Know how often your plant needs to be watered. Most plants are overwatered. Water to the depth of the root zone (1ft for groundcovers/wildflowers, 2ft for shrubs, 3ft for trees) and at the drip line (at the edge of the plant's canopy where the feeder roots are) *each time you water*. Water again when a screwdriver won't penetrate the soil more than 4 inches. Often this may be no more frequent than every 2 -3 weeks. A "Low Water Plant List" which lists the suggested watering frequencies for specific low water plants and "When Do I Water" guidelines for low and high water use plants are available by calling *Water Wise*, or found in information racks at your public library, city hall and other locations in your city.

NEW PLANTS? You may need to haul water. You can use your gray water- but be careful of soaps and salts. Your biggest challenge is to keep the root ball moist enough so that it doesn't separate from the soil. Check the soil moisture before you water again and don't forget to mulch, mulch, mulch.

USE SHADE CLOTH: Shade new or tender plants to help keep them from transpiring (losing water) too much.

USE GRAY WATER: It is legal for residents to use gray water without permitting. Gray water is any household water except kitchen sink, dishwasher and toilet wastewater. Do not use soaps with boron in them (read the label) and water softened with a sodium salt (potassium salt is OK). Gray water can be used on potted plants, fruit and nut trees, and landscape plants, but be careful not to let it splash on anything you will eat.

TURF: Unfortunately there is not much you can do. Hopefully you have a warm season grass like bermuda or buffalo which will become stressed, but should revive after the rains start.

PLAN FOR FUTURE WATER RESTRICTIONS

HARVEST RAINWATER: Think big. 1,000 sqft of roof will yield 600 gallons in a 1 inch rain. Rain tanks are available in many sizes, shapes and materials. Paint them to fit into a landscape, bury them or put one under the patio you want to build. Contour your landscape with dips and basins, and direct rainwater to planted areas. Dig a "sump" to capture larger quantities of rain. Try and keep as much water on your property as possible when it rains.

PLUMB FOR GRAY WATER: Plumb for optional gray water use in new homes as retrofitting can be expensive. Plumbing for washing machine wastewater to go into the landscape is the easiest and least expensive retrofit option (see the above gray water tip for details). To order a booklet on plumbing options, visit http://watercasa.org/publications/Graywater_Guidelines.pdf

CONSIDER REDUCING THE SIZE OF YOUR WATERED LANDSCAPE: Does your landscaped area need to be as big as it is? Perhaps you can reduce the size and turn the outer parts into “desert” or “naturescape” that requires no extra water. These natural areas can attract wildlife and have interest as they change with the seasons. Plant local native plants to enhance the natural environment. Around your home, consider a courtyard where higher water use plants can be planted.

PLANT IN THE FALL, not the spring. Plant cold sensitive plants in the spring, but most other plants are best planted in the fall, as they need less supplemental water to get established. Cacti, agaves, and other succulents are fine to plant in the heat (cacti actually prefer it), and need very little water once planted. If you plant a cactus from a pad, do not water it at all. If the succulents have roots, water very sparingly until the summer rains (use your gray water). The *Water Wise* program has developed a new “No Water” plant list which is available by calling the Extension office and found in the information racks.

DO NOT OVER-FERTILIZE: Fertilization increases plant water use by encouraging more growth. Most low water landscape plants do not need fertilizers.

DOWN-SIZE, ELIMINATE OR REPLACE TURF WITH SYNTHETIC LAWN: Turf can be the most water intensive planting in a landscape. If you don’t need the turf, replace it with lower water use landscape options. If you need turf, consider a synthetic lawn or a native grass turf.

OTHER DROUGHT TIPS

COVER YOUR POOL: Each square foot of exposed water will evaporate about 40 gallons per year.

USE CARTRIDGE FILTERS on your pool instead of sand filters. Save thousands of gallons/year.

For more WATER SAVING Tips

***Water Wise* Workshop Series**

A free series of workshops are offered by the *Water Wise* program. For a schedule, visit the website below, information racks in your town, or call the office.

Free On- Site Visit

A water conservation specialist is available to come to your home or business free of charge and give you tips specific to your needs. Low water plants, landscape design, leak detection and irrigation schedules are just some of topics discussed.

Contact the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension’s *Water Wise* program

Sierra Vista: 458-8278 x 2141, Willcox: 384-3594, Douglas: 364-4146, Benson: 586-3467

www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/waterwise

Water Wise is a University of Arizona Cooperative Extension program whose Partners are Cochise County, the City of Sierra Vista, the Upper San Pedro Partnership and Ft. Huachuca. Additional support is provided by Bella Vista, Arizona and Pueblo del Sol Water Companies, SSVEC and the Southeast Arizona Association of Realtors.