

Fact sheet: Saving water in the garden

Australians love the great outdoors, and gardening is one of our favourite past times. We all want inviting outdoor spaces to enjoy with our families and friends. However, in the pursuit of a green garden, we use approximately forty percent (40%) of household water outside.

More and more households are now carefully considering both how they use water and can save water. Careful planning and design of your garden is one of the most practical ways to save water and money, whilst maintaining an enjoyable garden. Following are some handy waterwise tips to inspire your green thumb!

Planning is the key

Plan the trees and shrubs you wish to grow in your garden. All plants have different requirements and so it is important to consider the water needs of a plant as well as its size and appearance. Many native Australian plants have low watering requirements, and flourish in drier conditions. Speak with your local nursery professional for advice on the best plants for your needs.

One of the most effective ways of saving water in the garden is to group your plants according to their water needs. By grouping the plants in the garden into high or low water users, you can design a watering pattern that is better for your plants, and will prevent wasting water on plants that don't need it.

Tip: By choosing water efficient plants, you can create a low maintenance garden and save money on water.

Improve your soil

Soil moisture content is vital to the health of any plant. Most sandy soils have a low organic matter level, which means that water and nutrients pass rapidly through the soil.

Add plenty of organic matter such as compost and manure to the soil to improve water retention, plant health and soil structure. This is one of the most important steps in making your garden drought-tolerant.

Tip: The healthier your plants are, the more likely they are to withstand drought conditions.

Reduce grassed areas

Lawns require more water than other areas of the garden, and offer a great opportunity to conserve water and save money. When designing your landscape, reduce the area covered by lawns as much as possible – consider using paving, mulch or water efficient plants and groundcovers instead.

The shape of lawns and gardens is also important for effective watering. Where possible, build driveways, paths and paved areas so that rain run-off can be directed onto a lawn and/or garden area, rather than going down the drain.

Try not to cut your grass too short. Leave a blade length of at least two centimetres to protect the surface and reduce evaporation loss. And, remember to keep your grass cuttings to use as mulch on your garden.

Tip: Choose slow growing, drought tolerant lawn varieties.

Water wisely

Make sure that water goes directly to the roots of your plants and surrounding soil, rather than spraying the leaves and flowers.

In addition, water your garden in the cool of the early morning, or in the evening. Watering in the heat of the day is wasteful as most of the water will evaporate before it reaches the roots.

A lot of water can be saved with an efficient and well designed garden irrigation system. A wide range of watering systems are available, from sophisticated automatic systems to simple trigger hoses. All systems can be efficient, simply by planning your watering and staying with this pattern. Your irrigation professional or local nursery can provide advice on the best system for your needs.

Tip: Water your garden less often, but more thoroughly. This encourages your plants to extend their roots deeper, making them more robust and less thirsty.

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Use more mulch

Mulch reduces water loss through evaporation, adds nutrients to your soil and keeps weeds at bay. There are many different mulch products including leaves, woodchips, hay, compost or newspaper. Mulch is added straight to the soil surface and prevents evaporation by shielding the soil from the sun and reducing run-off during rain or watering.

Every part of the garden can be mulched, and it is one of the easiest and cheapest ways to make the most of water in your garden. Spread it at least seven millimetres thick, ensuring the mulch is kept clear of tree trunks and plant stems to avoid rot. Try to top-up your mulch every season, as most mulches break down quickly to become part of the soil.

***Tip:** Mulching your garden can save up to 73% of water normally lost through evaporation.*

Waterwise Gardening brochure series

If you would like more information on creating and maintaining a water efficient garden, Western Water has a series of free Waterwise Gardening brochures available to customers:

- Water efficient shrubs
- Waterwise watering and irrigation systems
- Saving water and money with your existing lawn
- You can have beautiful flowers and still conserve water
- Successful pot plants using less water
- How to identify water efficient plants at a glance

These brochures can be obtained by calling Western Water on 1300 650 425 or emailing mail@westernwater.com.au. They are also available electronically at www.westernwater.com.au.

For further information

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