



Water wise gardening

There are lots of changes you can make, both large and small, to increase your garden's water efficiency.

A water wise garden not only saves water. It can be a low maintenance garden as well. With smaller lawn areas, effective use of mulching and landscaping and a properly designed irrigation system, water wise gardens are often less work than conventional gardens.

A water wise garden need not be native, it can be formal, cottage, Asian, child friendly—we just need to be smarter about the plants we use and how we use them.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Soil preparation.** By improving your soil with organic matter like manure or compost, you will improve plant growth, use less water and fertilisers and have healthier plants. Improving the soil is necessary to make it permeable enough for water to reach the roots of plants, rather than running off. Compacted soil should be turned over with a fork, and organic material such as compost or manure dug in to a spade's depth. Adding gypsum will help clay soils. If additional soil is brought in, it should be thoroughly mixed into the natural soil of the block.
- **Plant selection.** Consider selecting plants that tolerate dry conditions. But remember that plants will only be drought tolerant after they have established a good root system. It is important to feed and water new plants until they are established. Ask your local nursery for advice on plants that are suitable for a water-efficient garden.
- **Group plants with similar water needs.** By grouping plants with similar water requirements you can ensure each plant is getting only what it needs.
- **Reducing lawn areas.** Consider replacing some of your lawn area with permeable paving, pebbles or hardy ground covers that require less water. You may also look at using turf varieties that do not use a lot of water. Ask your local turf supplier for information. Also see the Lawns and saving water fact sheet for more information about water-efficient lawns.
- **Check the soil before watering.** You may think your plants will need watering every second day, but often this is not the case. Environmental factors such as wind, sun intensity and rainfall will have a major impact. For these reasons, it is difficult to say how often you will need to water. By checking the soil you can determine whether the ground is dry and whether you need to water.
- **Water efficiently.** Many plants can be trained to require less water. By watering them less frequently but for longer periods of time you will encourage the roots to grow deeper. Cyclic watering is an efficient watering method that keeps your garden healthy with minimal water usage. This method does not cause excessive pooling or run-off, and helps water to penetrate the soil. You can apply the following principles of cyclic watering to all watering methods.

Water the area until pooling or run-off begins (often five minutes is enough) and then turn the water off. Wait for half an hour to one hour to allow the water to soak into the soil, and then repeat the cycle. In between watering cycles, dig down to see how far the water has penetrated the soil. Repeat the cycle until the water reaches the depth of the root zone.

The best watering system is one that delivers water directly to plant roots (not the leaves) in correct quantities at the right time. Drippers, tap timers, trigger hoses and micro-irrigation systems should be used to deliver water in the most efficient manner. Your local garden centre or irrigation professional can offer valuable advice.

Check the four-day weather forecast with the Bureau of Meteorology (www.bom.gov.au). If there is rain ahead, let the rain do your watering for you. Before watering, make sure you are aware of the watering requirements under the ACT's Permanent Water Conservation Measures or any temporary water restrictions.

- **Use a wetting agent.** A good wetting agent will encourage the water to penetrate evenly, allowing you to use water more efficiently.
- **Apply mulch.** A 75mm layer of mulch reduces evaporation from the soil, discourages weed growth, reduces run-off and keeps the soil cooler in summer. Organic mulches break down over a period of time and have the advantage of adding organic matter and attracting earthworms to improve the soil.
- **Maintenance.** Weeding, pruning and checking and adjusting irrigation systems help to reduce water demand. Leaking or misaligned drippers and sprinkler heads waste a lot of water. Periodically check your irrigation system for these problems, and clear any blocked drippers.

WATER RESOURCES STRATEGY

Think water, act water is the ACT Government's strategy for sustainable water use and management. It aims to reduce Canberra's per person water consumption by 12 per cent by 2013 and 25 per cent by 2023.

WATER EFFICIENCY INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

You may wish to consider the home and garden water efficiency programs offered as part of the ACT Government's water strategy, *Think water, act water*.

Details of all ACT Government water efficiency incentives programs are available on www.thinkwater.act.gov.au

WATERWISE GARDENING WORKSHOPS

ACTEW Corporation, in conjunction with local, independent specialists offer waterwise gardening workshops designed to teach you to have a healthier garden that uses less water. At the workshop you will learn about efficient garden watering systems and methods, and the benefits of using mulch and drought tolerant plants. For more information, or to book a place at a workshop, call ACTEW's Water Conservation Office on 6248 3131.

XERISCAPE GARDENS

Visit the ActewAGL Xeriscape Gardens at Heysen Street, Weston to learn more about water efficient gardening. The gardens are open to the public at selected times on weekends during spring and summer (excluding the Christmas/New Year period), or by appointment. To check details of opening times and events at the gardens, visit the ActewAGL website at www.actewagl.com.au or call 6242 1191.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on water issues, water efficiency rebates and *Think water, act water* initiatives, contact:

Ph: 13 22 81

Email: WaterResources@act.gov.au

Website: www.thinkwater.act.gov.au

For more information on Permanent Water Conservation Measures or other temporary water restrictions, call the ACTEW Water Conservation Office on 6248 3131 or visit www.actew.com.au