



Don't send money down the drain

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Water smart to save money

Most homeowners over-water their yards, unwittingly wasting money every time they turn on the hose. Adopting water-savvy habits not only helps reduce this waste, it saves money while promoting a healthier lawn and landscape. According to the Irrigation Association, you should follow these tips to ensure that your lawn is getting the most out of your watering schedule.

Water it right

Watering at the right time of day, when the sun is low, the winds are calm and temperatures are cool, will save a lot of water — as much as 30 percent — by reducing evaporative losses. The best time to water is late afternoon, evening and just before sunrise.

—Saturate the root zones. Roots are generally within the top 6 inches of soil. Water roots, then let the soil dry. Watering too frequently results in shallow roots, weed growth, disease and fungus.

—Don't water too long. Water each zone several times for short periods rather than in one long session. This reduces run-off.

—Take careful aim. Be sure sprinklers are not watering driveways, sidewalks, patios or buildings. That's all water down the drain.

Plan right and plant right to save water

Conserving water doesn't have to involve a lot of trenching and plumbing. These tips can be implemented as part of your normal landscaping and gardening routine.

—Aerate your lawn and around trees at least once a year to ensure good water penetration. Turn and cultivate soil, adding compost, or fertilizer, when planting.

—Mulch well around plants, bushes and trees. Using 2 to 4 inches of mulch reduces evaporation, moderates soil temperatures, improves water penetration and helps to control weeds that compete for water.

—Landscape to suit your lot. Evaluate your yard conditions (sun, shade, dry and damp areas) and purchase turf or plant species that have low water requirements and are well suited to the area of the yard where they will be

planted.

—Hydro-zone your yard. Group landscape plants with similar moisture needs in the same area. Separate them from turf areas, which have different water requirements.

—Plant in spring or fall when less water is needed to establish new plants. Smaller plants require less water to become established.

—Create functional turf areas, for example, in play areas. Avoid using turf where it's difficult to irrigate properly, such as on steep slopes.

Good alternatives for hard-to-irrigate areas include ground covers, perimeter plants and mulch.

—Plant shade trees to lower the air and soil temperatures. This will reduce soil moisture loss.

—Maintain your yard by mowing, weeding, pruning and irrigating as needed. A well-maintained yard requires less water.

Upgrade your watering tools

The key to sticking with any irrigation program is to make it as efficient as possible. This means not only using the amount of water you need, but also streamlining the whole irrigation process. If you love caring for your lawn and garden but hate the hassle of prepping watering equipment and wrestling with the hose, consider using an automated hose reel, such as the No-Crank hose reel (www.no-crank.com) that rewinds the hose with the flip of a lever. It not only keeps you and your yard cleaner, but can also help keep you on track with irrigation.