

## WATER-WISE CONSERVATION STEPS

Many Texas water utilities charge higher rates during the summer or increase rates in increments based on use. Reducing your outdoor water use by following these steps can produce substantial savings in your water bill:

- Determine how much water your landscape needs to stay healthy.
- Use water-efficient landscape practices, such as proper mowing, mulching, and moderate fertilizing.
- Design a water-efficient landscape by planting drought-tolerant grass and choosing plants that are native or well adapted to the climate conditions in your area.

## WATER-WISE LANDSCAPE

### How often should I water?

Only when needed. One inch of water once a week should be sufficient to keep most Texas lawns healthy.

Proper watering will help grass and shrubs develop deep roots (it is especially important to start this during the spring when root growth is at its peak). Over-watered turf will have a short root system and will not be drought tolerant. By slowly adjusting to successively longer periods between waterings, the turf can grow deeper roots and become drought tolerant.

### What time of day should I water?

Early morning or late evening during hot summer months. Otherwise, the water can simply evaporate between the sprinkler and grass.

### What should I water?

Only your plants. Don't water the sidewalks and driveways. Use a broom to sweep debris away.

### How can I use rainwater?

Harvest it. Funnel the water from your gutters into a barrel or cistern and save it for a sunny day. Rainwater is free and better for your plants because it doesn't contain hard minerals.

## WATER-WISE LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

### When should I mow?

Only when the grass is dry. And don't cut more than one-third of its length at one time. Taller grass holds moisture better, encourages deeper root growth, and is less susceptible to browning. Keep grass 3 inches tall during the summer (taller than 3 inches stresses the grass).

### What should I do with my grass clippings?

Mulch or compost them. Grass clippings break down quickly and provide valuable nutrients.

### How can I conserve soil moisture?

Use lots of mulch. It will make your shrubs and young trees more tolerant to the scorching Texas heat.

- 1 to 3 inches of mulch
  - retains moisture
  - reduces runoff
  - helps moderate soil temperatures
  - aids in root development
  - reduces erosion
  - slows weed growth
  - prevents soil compaction
  - makes your landscape beautiful

- Place mulch directly on the soil or weed barrier fabric that can "breathe." Avoid using sheet plastic in planting areas.
- Apply a thin layer of compost to the lawn. It functions like mulch, increases organic content, and protects grass roots.

### What should I know about fertilizing?

Apply fertilizer in the spring and fall. It helps develop good root systems to keep your grass more drought tolerant.

Don't overfertilize because it can run off and pollute local waterways. Too much fertilizer will also increase the grass's need for water. Contact your County AgriLife Extension Service or local nursery professional for a soil kit and recommendations for fertilizer.

### How else can I improve my landscape?

Improve the soil. If the soil is rocky, sandy, shallow, heavy clay, or has little organic matter, it can be improved by adding several inches of high quality loam soil and 2 to 3 inches of organic matter such as mulch or compost.

High quality soil helps reduce irrigation needs by retaining water better when added to sandy and clay soils. Unless the soil is damaged or depleted, native and well-adapted plants may not require imported soil. Aerate the lawn once a year. Weed the lawn and garden as needed. Weeds rob plants of valuable water.

### How else can I minimize water use?

Don't forget your pools, spas, and fountains.

- Cover pools and spas when not in use to lessen evaporation.
- Backwash your filter only as necessary.

## DESIGN A WATER-WISE LANDSCAPE

Plant water-efficient, well-adapted, and/or native shrubs and trees. Bermuda, buffalo, and zoysia are drought-tolerant grasses. Choose plants that are drought tolerant (or at least have low water requirements) and heat tolerant and can survive the minimum winter temperatures in your local area. Native plants are also more resistant to diseases and pests.

Put drought-tolerant groundcover instead of grass in areas that are narrow, small, sloping, odd-shaped, or close to pavement. Limit turf areas to those needed for practical uses.

Contact your County AgriLife Extension Agent, your water-wise landscape professional, or your city or water supplier for recommendations of water-efficient plants that are adapted to your area of the state and additional information on efficient landscape water use.

