

Simple Tips to Avoid Wasting Water on Lawn and Garden...

In the Houston area, the heat just seems to last longer each year. With summer showers few and far between, there has been alarmingly little rain to give the ground a really good soaking. By Labor Day, many homeowners had given up trying to revive wilting plants and grass. Plants and shrubs looked peaked and stressed – and many have actually died.

According to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), as much as half of our outdoor use of water in the warmer months is wasted because of poor watering practices. This can take quite a toll on the water bill since 50 to 80 percent of our water consumption during those months is used outside. It makes good common sense to learn to use this valuable resource more efficiently to save both water and money.

This is a good time to take a realistic look at the way you use water for lawn and garden. When do you water the lawn? For how long at a time? Does the sprinkler hit the driveway, sidewalks or

street? If you have a sprinkler system, is it set to turn off if it rains? Do you wait for the plants or grass to look wilted before watering, or do you water on a regular basis? When you set the sprinkler out, do you just place it at random? Or do you have a “plan” for distributing the water over a specific area?



We have taken our water resources for granted for so long that some wasteful habits die hard. But with the Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District mandate to reduce our dependency on groundwater, everyone is paying more attention to using water more efficiently in an effort to control costs, as well. Here are some simple tips to help you put a realistic, cost-effective water efficiency plan into effect outside your home.

At the top of the list is the recommendation to use native plants and shrubs whenever possible in landscaping your yard. They generally require watering less frequently, and are often low-maintenance, too. The TWDB and the Texas Department of Agriculture County Extension Service point out that different varieties of grasses, plants and soils require different amounts of water.

In Houston, for example, Buffalo-grass has a low water need compared to Bermuda (moderate)



and St. Augustine’s high “thirst” requirement. Experts suggest that grass should be watered separately from flower beds and landscaped areas. When original landscape planning is an option, be sure to “zone” plants according to their water requirements.

Use the kind of watering equipment that best suits your “target.” Use sprinklers – ones that broadcast large drops are best – for the lawn areas, and soaker hoses or drip irrigation systems for trees, shrubs and flower beds.

Lawns generally absorb the greatest amount of outdoor



residential water use, and studies have shown that folks may inadvertently water twice as much as necessary to keep a healthy lawn. This is easily remedied by knowing when to water. Look for signs of stress – limp or curled, dull green blades of grass, or footprints left behind after walking across the lawn – or use a moisture gauge.

In the Houston area, experts recommend watering every





five days to apply .75 to 1 inch of water (subtracting any rainfall) during summer months. This amount will wet the soil to a depth of 4-6 inches. Water during early morning or evening hours when evaporation losses will be less than during the heat of the day. Avoid watering in high winds that might send the droplets to places they are not needed – like your neighbor’s lawn or driveway.

If you want to know how much water it takes to deliver the right amount of moisture to your grass, place some empty cans or jars in strategic places around the lawn, turn on the sprinkler and let it run for half an hour. Add the total inches of water captured in all the receptacles and then divide by the number of cans to get the average. Simply multiply by two if



you want to know how much water is “sprinkled” in an hour.

It will also help if you don’t cut the grass too short. Longer blades will help reduce evaporation and shade the soil. Maintaining this slightly deeper carpet of

grass will help prevent the lawn from turning yellow or brown, as well.

Use a good mulch layer in flower beds and landscape areas. This covers the soil, helps to hold down the weed growth that can siphon off water from your plants, and helps retain the moisture in the soil. Remember that “zoning” plants according to their water requirements in the landscape plan can also help you water more efficiently.



Finally, use drip or trickle irrigation – the slow, frequent application of very small amounts of water to the soil area directly surrounding the plant roots – to take care of gardens and landscaped areas. Drip irrigation can save up to 60 percent of water delivered by other systems. This can be done quite well and cost-effectively by the strategic placement of soaker hoses – porous tubes that continuously “leak” water.

By using our water supplies efficiently, we can hold down our water bills, which can minimize the long-term impact on our pocket-books as this valuable resource becomes more costly in the years ahead. ♠