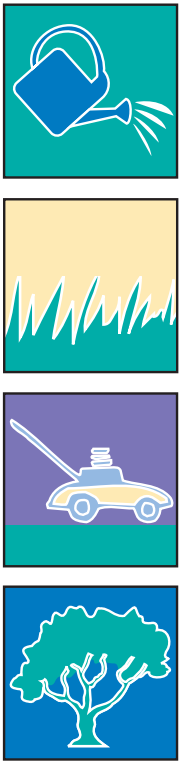
WATER-WISE LANDSCAPING



Santa Margarita Water District

Become Water-Wise

In our District alone, we use water at a rate of up to 44 million gallons per day at peak times of the year. It's no wonder experts predict shortages in our future. And scarcity makes water's value climb. This is why we all should take simple steps to be more water conscious.

Nearly half the water used in a household is for irrigating the yard, planters and gardens. Of all the things we use water for, landscaping needs it the least. Chances are we over-water our lawn and garden without realizing it, considering turf can absorb 65 percent more water than it really needs.

The first step in water-wise landscaping is to adjust sprinklers with the seasons. Plants do not need as much water in the fall and winter months as in the summer. You also can purchase beautiful plants and shrubs that use less water. Following are some basic tips on how to conserve water in your yard and help reduce your water bill.

Plant the Seed of Conservation

Xeriscape — or drought-tolerant landscaping — incorporates the following seven basic principles which can lead to saving water.

Start With a Plan

Create a well thought-out landscape design. Sketch your yard with locations of existing structures, trees, shrubs and grass areas. Visit local landscape architects, designers or nurserymen to determine your landscape budget, appearance, function, maintenance and water requirements. Keep in mind that each home has its own microclimate with different shade areas and hot spots that need to be planned for.

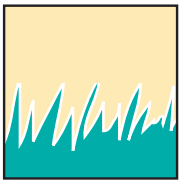
Soil Analysis and Preparation

To increase plant health and conserve water, add organic matter to the soil of shrub and flowerbed areas. This increases the soil's ability to absorb and store water. As a rule of thumb, fill in four inches of organic material such as shredded pine bark, peat and rice hulls. Using organic matter is not necessary for tree and grass areas.

Plant Selection

Select trees, shrubs and groundcovers (e.g., junipers, ice plants, gazanias, African daisies) based on their adaptability to your area's soil and climate. Even within the District, soil types and microclimates change dramatically. If you're unsure what to plant, check with your local nursery for recommendations on adapted landscape plants for your area.

Grass Selection



When planning your landscape, use a grass that needs less water. Better yet, plant less of it. For maximum efficiency, plant the lowest water-use turfgrass adapted to the region, such as fescue, to reduce your overall water requirements. Reduce the size of lawn area through the use of patios, decks, shrub beds and groundcovers, and you'll significantly reduce your water consumption and yard work.

Landscape Maintenance

Xeriscape landscaping needs less maintenance. A well-designed landscape can decrease time spent in the yard by nearly 50 percent through reduced mowing, once-a-year mulching, elimination of unadapted plants and more efficient watering techniques.

Watering

Lawns and gardens often don't absorb a large portion of the water applied to them. Some water is lost to runoff and some water evaporates from exposed, unmulched soil. The greatest waste of water is applying too much too often.

Excess irrigation also can leach nutrients deep into the soil away from plant roots. Similarly, runoff caused by excess irrigation can carry polluting fertilizers and pesticides to streams and lakes.

Lawns: Over-watering can be worse for your lawn than under-watering, so it's important to know exactly how much water your lawn needs.

The best time to water your lawn is in the early morning or early evening when there is less wind and heat. Water only when the soil is dry four to six inches below the surface. Use a screwdriver or other probe to determine dryness. If the grass doesn't spring back after walking on it or you notice signs of wilting or discoloration, it's probably time for you to irrigate.

Trees and Shrubs: Planted trees and shrubs need more frequent watering until they become well rooted, which may take two growing seasons. Once established, they can then be weaned to tolerate less frequent watering. Proper weaning develops deep roots and increases drought-tolerance. In the absence of rain, most trees and shrubs benefit from being watered once a month. Remember that normal lawn watering is not a substitute for thorough tree and shrub watering.

(continued)

CONSERVATION TIP

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Irrigation Systems

The goal of an irrigation system is to give plants a sufficient amount of water without waste. By zoning an irrigation system, grass areas can be watered separately and more frequently than groundcovers, shrubs and trees. Both sprinkler and drip irrigation systems can be incorporated to achieve water conservation.

Sprinkler Irrigation: Sprinkler irrigation is the most commonly used method of landscape watering. Even though a permanent sprinkler system can be more water efficient than a hose-end sprinkler, both systems require little maintenance and apply large volumes of water in a short time.

If you have a permanent sprinkler system, adjust the sprinkler heads so they don't water the sidewalk or driveway. A properly adjusted sprinkler head sprays large droplets of water instead of a fog of fine mist, which is more susceptible to evaporation and wind drift.

Drip Irrigation: Compared to sprinklers, drip irrigation offers increased watering efficiency and plant performance by slowly applying water to soil. The water flows under low pressure through emitters, bubblers or spray heads placed at each plant. Water applied by drip irrigation has little chance of waste through evaporation or runoff.

Seeking professional irrigation advice and experimenting with available drip irrigation products in small sections of the landscape can help you become familiar with the benefits of this watering technique.

Other Ways to Conserve

Proper Mowing

Mowing the grass at the proper cutting height conserves water, keeps your lawn dense and reduces problems. The general rule of thumb is to never remove more than one-third of the length of grass above the soil each time you mow.

Proper Fertilizing

Fertilizer provides the lawn with the nutrients it needs for optimum growth. Applying the proper amount of fertilizer helps you keep your lawn healthy throughout the year and cuts down on the amount of watering needed to keep it green. On the other hand, fertilizers also can be a major source of pollution to streams, if excessive amounts are applied.

Fertilize the lawn twice a year to produce a beautiful turf without excess growth. Use a slow-release form of nitrogen in the spring application and a quick-release form in the fall. Apply one pound of nitrogen fertilizer per 1,000 square feet of lawn at one time. By using this fertilizing schedule, no other fertilizer is needed for shrubs and trees in the lawn area.

Want to Learn More?

Additional sources for information:

On-line:

Lawn & Landscape Digest:
www.lawninstitute.com

Home & Garden Television:
www.hgtv.com

Sunset Magazine:
www.sunset.com

Books:

"Sunset Western Garden Book"
Kathleen N. Brenzel, Sunset Editors
Sunset Books
1997

"Plants for Dry Climates:
How to Select, Grow, and Enjoy"
Mary Rose Duffield, Warren D. Jones
Fisher Books
September 1998

"The Healthy Lawn Handbook"
Lane Winward
Lyons and Burford Publishers
April 1992

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