

How you can have your plants and water them, too.

Conserving water in your landscape doesn't have to be complicated. A simple tuna can is a great start. Scatter a few around your yard and turn on the sprinkler. Measure how much water is in the cans after 15 minutes and look at the accompanying chart to learn how long you should water your lawn every third day.

That's just the beginning. This brochure is packed with tips and information to help you improve your landscape while preserving one of our most precious resources. In addition, your local garden retailer is an excellent source of knowledge, so if you need to know something that isn't addressed here, just ask.

But first, a look at why plants are so important and why any time is the right time to green up your yard.

The power of plants

- 1 Take a deep breath, then go out and thank the millions of plants that filter out dust and pollutants from the atmosphere. One tree can remove 26 pounds of carbon dioxide each year and release 13 pounds of oxygen daily, enough for a family of four.
- 2 Shade trees and windbreaks reduce energy consumption, which means you pay for less electricity and dams have to generate less power. In the end, plants save water.
- 3 Plants are an investment. Landscaping adds value to real estate and can speed property sales. Various surveys show value increases from 7 to 15 percent.



LAWN WATERING GUIDE			
Can Depth	Minutes to Water Every Third Day		
	Spring	Summer	Fall
¼"	15	30	12
½"	7	15	6
¾"	5	10	4
1"	4	8	3

- 4 Plants provide habitat for the wild things that share our green spaces, including the small critters in your yard.
- 5 On a hot day, lawns will be 30 degrees cooler than nearby pavement, producing a moderating effect on the environment.
- 6 Roots stabilize soil and control erosion.
- 7 Trees also shade our rivers and streams, keeping them cool and productive.
- 8 Strategically placed trees and shrubs can add privacy and reduce traffic noise.
- 9 Vegetation filters pollutants from water flowing toward lakes and streams, and reduces runoff.
- 10 Gardening with gusto offers many of the same health benefits as more traditional forms of exercise.
- 11 Beautiful landscapes encourage feelings of relaxation and well being. Studies show that plants can stimulate healing, as well as intellectual, social, emotional and physical development.

It's best to water plants deeply and less often.

Getting a good start

Whether it's turf, trees, or anything in between, one of the best things you can do for your plants is to give them a good foundation with quality soil. Start with at least 6 inches, but 12-18 inches is even better. It's a good idea to test your soil to determine its composition and nutrient needs. Correcting imbalances will result in healthier plants and less water waste. Extension services can help with this, and kits are available at garden stores. While you're there, ask your local retailer to share their hints for proper planting techniques.

Water conservation takes a can-do attitude

Once you've properly installed your landscaping, it is important to give each plant the correct amount of water, keeping in mind that more isn't always better. In fact, it's best to water plants deeply but less often to encourage the development of roots that go deep into the ground to seek moisture. Frequent watering results in shallow roots and less hardy plants.

A professional landscape contractor or architect can help you create a total water-management plan for your yard. The following are some easy ways to be smart with water:

In general

- 1 Prevent and control weeds, which compete for water and nutrients.
- 2 Trees and shrubs typically require less water than turf and should be irrigated separately. Don't rely on your lawn sprinkler to water your shrubs and trees – you'll be over-watering those plants, making them less healthy and inhibiting their ability to become more water efficient.

- 3 Add a rain switch to automatic sprinkler systems to prevent wasteful "double watering" on rainy days, and postpone irrigation when rain is predicted.
- 4 Have a container set up to catch rain that does fall, and use collected water on container plants both indoors and out. A drop of oil in the water will deter mosquitoes.
- 5 Water early morning or late evening versus midday, when evaporation is greatest. Note that morning watering reduces problems with mildews and soil-borne diseases.
- 6 Check sprinkler systems for leaks. Signs to look for include muddy spots and broken or clogged sprinkler heads. You'll save water – and money, too.

Trees, shrubs, flowers

- 1 Don't be fooled: Most established landscape shrubs need infrequent watering. Check the soil moisture level at a depth of 4-6 inches. The plant should not be wilted, but the soil should be dry and crumbly before watering. In hot summer months, plants need water only when they show signs of stress in the morning. Plants show stress in the afternoon because of the heat, not necessarily because they are water stressed.



CONTAINER PLANTS

1 or more times per day when hot and humid

ANNUAL BEDDING PLANTS

Keep soil moist but not soggy

TURF GRASS

See chart above

PERENNIALS

Need more water when young and during growth and bloom

SHRUBS

Water should penetrate the entire root zone – within the first 2 feet for most shrubs and trees

MATURE, ESTABLISHED TREES

Without rain, trees benefit from a thorough watering once a month during the growth period

MOST OFTEN

WATERING FREQUENCY

LEAST OFTEN

When determining your landscape's water needs, consider the root systems. In general plants with small shallow roots require water more often. Immature plants need water more often than those that are established.

Mulch keeps away weeds and aids moisture retention

- 2 Build watering basins around the root areas of plants in well drained soils to aid in deep watering of new or established landscape shrubs. Fill slowly to allow soil to accept water without runoff. It may be necessary to repeat with large plants. Note that basins are not necessary with drip irrigation systems.
- 3 Mulch under plants to speed water penetration to roots, reducing evaporation and soil erosion.
- 4 Thinning out dense trees and shrubs will cut down on transpiration, the loss of moisture through leaves.
- 5 Be very conservative during times of drought. Water plants for survival not to create lush growth.

Lawn

- 1 Healthy, properly irrigated turf rarely requires more than 1 inch of water per week. Clues that your lawn needs water: footprints remain evident in the grass for half hour or leaf blades roll or wilt in the morning.
- 2 Aeration improves water penetration and encourages deeper roots. Buy a hand aerator if your yard is small, or rent a larger machine for bigger areas. Leave the plugs on the lawn to help decompose thatch.
- 3 Water occasionally but deeply to make every gallon count. Making sure water penetrates deep into the ground will encourage healthier roots, allowing turf to last longer between waterings. Since it takes water longer to soak through clay soil, it is preferable to irrigate in short cycles rather than one long cycle. Turn off the sprinkler when the soil stops absorbing water, wait awhile, then resume. But don't confuse this method with the ineffective practice of frequent light waterings. Surface watering will encourage roots to stay shallow; whereas infrequent but regular deep watering will guide roots farther into the soil, where they can seek out moisture.

- 4 Don't over-fertilize with nitrogen. A soil test is the only way to be sure you are correcting any deficiencies. Too much fertilizer can be just as harmful as not enough.
- 5 Grass that is left un-mowed will release water vapor more readily than grass that has been properly cut. Mow frequently enough so that no more than one-third of the leaf blade is removed at any mowing, and increase the cutting height to expand the root system. Leave clippings on the lawn to help retain moisture.

Don't forget the mulch

Mulches discourage weeds, prevent runoff and help the soil retain moisture.

ORGANIC MULCHES: Pine needles, compost, shredded bark, grass clippings, wood chips and crushed nut shells.

INORGANIC MULCHES: Rock, gravel and landscape fabric.

- 1 Many people make the mistake of spreading a thin layer of mulch, but at least 2-3 inches is needed to be effective. Too much, over 4 to 6 inches, can be detrimental.
- 2 Be sure to keep mulch away from the plant's trunk at ground level, because too much moisture can lead to rotting.

FAQ's

Does landscaping really add to the value of a home?

Definitely. Ask any real estate expert and they'll tell you that a well-maintained yard can add as much as 15 percent to a home's value.

What's an easy way to conserve water?

Irrigate in the early morning, when evaporation is lowest, to get the most out of every drop.

Why is mulching important?

Properly applied mulch helps the soil retain moisture and will discourage weeds and prevent runoff.

How much water does my lawn need?

An inch a week is all it asks. Deep, less frequent watering promotes healthy root systems that can better withstand dry spells.

Where can I get more information of water-wise landscaping?

Your local Alabama Cooperative County Extension Office or garden center is filled with knowledgeable staff, who are willing to offer advice.

Think you can't buy plants during a dry spell?

YOU CAN.

How to be wise with water in your landscape.



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