WATER-WISE IRRIGATION EQUIPMENT

What is the most efficient irrigation system for nonturf areas?

Drip irrigation. It is the most efficient method of watering bedded plants, trees, or shrubs. Soaker hoses are an easy and inexpensive alternative to drip irrigation.

What type of sprinkler should I use for the lawn?

One that produces large drops of water close to the ground. Don't use a sprinkler that produces a mist or fine spray. Use a timer so you don't forget to turn the sprinkler off.

How should I manage my automatic sprinkler system for water efficiency?

Adjust the settings as needed. Don't just set it in the spring and leave it on all season. Automatic sprinkler systems provide an efficient method of watering lawns. Their controllers use timers to turn off the system when a measured amount of water is used, and rain shut-off devices prevent watering in the rain.

Not all plants have the same watering requirements. Reduce the run time of sprinklers on shrubs, which may not need as much water as grass. Shady areas may not need as much water either. Contact a professional landscape irrigation specialist for a maintenance check.

What maintenance is required for my automatic sprinkler system?

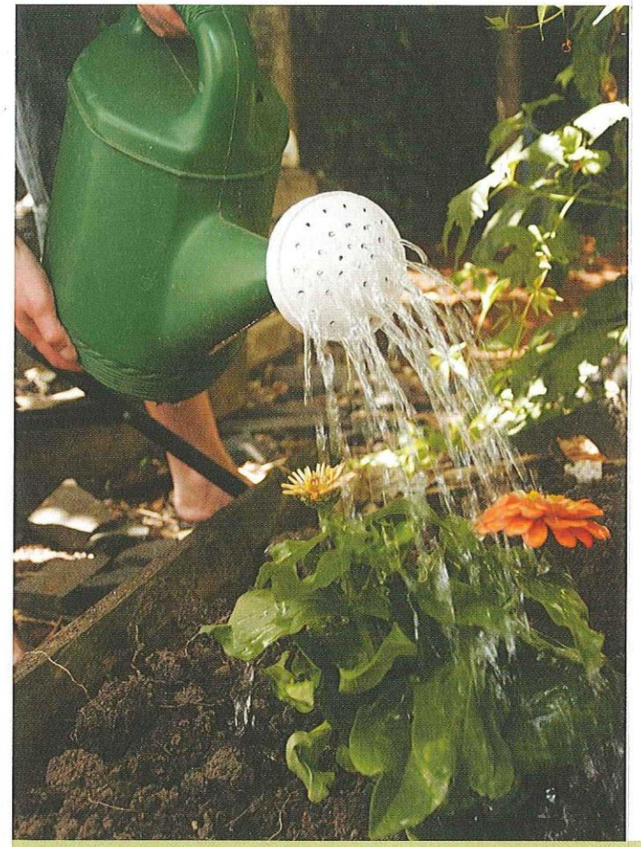
Check sprinkler heads regularly. Remove dirt or debris that may be clogging the nozzle and make sure the heads are working at the proper pressure and not leaking.

Repair or replace broken heads, valves, seals, and pipes. Once a month, run the sprinklers for a short time on each cycle while you are at home to make sure they are working properly.

What features should I look for in an automatic sprinkler system?

Options that will help you save water. The controller of new sprinkler systems should have these features:

- a multiple scheduling option
- a rain shut-off device
- a water budget feature (which allows percentage adjustments without having to reprogram)
- test functions



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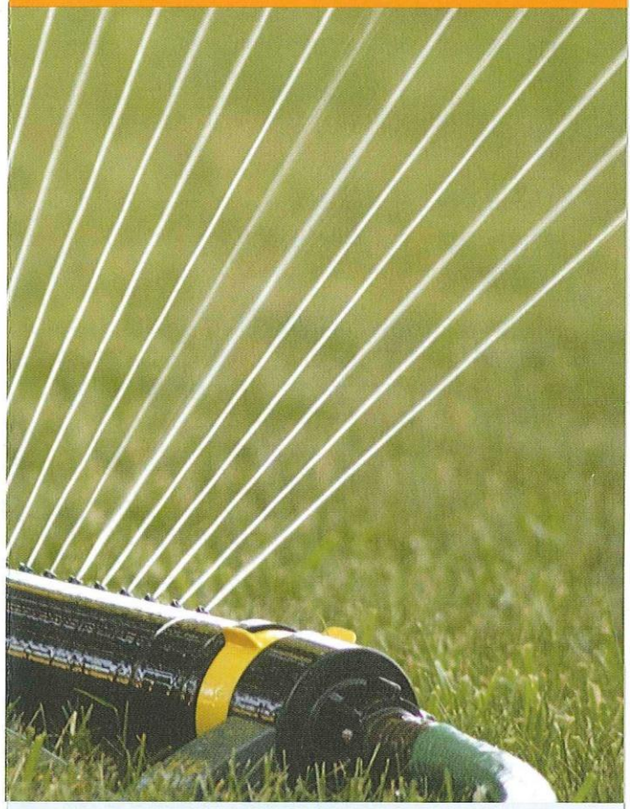
CONSERVING WATER OUTDOORS



IN THE SUMMER, outdoor water use can account for 50 to 80 percent of home water use.

Texans must use their precious water resources more efficiently, or we will have longer, more frequent water shortages, especially during droughts and hot Texas summers. Much of the water used outdoors is wasted through inefficient landscape watering practices. By reducing the amount of water we waste, we will save money and protect the quality of life of future Texans.

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.
- Turn off decorative fountains on windy days and during drought.

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.