

During a drought, one of our most precious resources, water, can become strained. According to the US EPA, of the 400 gallons of water a day the average family uses, 1/3 of that water goes to landscape irrigation. However, there are ways to garden and landscape that conserve and use water more efficiently.

Wise Watering

Watering deeply and infrequently helps to promote deep roots for plants, which can help plants survive even after a few days of no water.

- Water Deeply and Infrequently— this doesn't mean all at once, water for about 15– 20 minutes and repeat as needed
- Drip Irrigation — delivers water slowly and to the roots, rather than spraying water into the air and being lost to evaporation
- When **not** to water
 - When it's raining
 - Wait at least 2-3 days after a rainfall, and even longer for heavy storms
 - If the soil is wet
 - During the hottest parts of the day or water will be lost to evaporation

Rain Barrels

- Store Water — though it may not rain as often, when it does you will want to capture as much rain water as possible. If you can, try hooking up multiple rain barrels.
- Clean and Safe — the water collected can be used for lawn, flower gardens, and vegetable gardens, conserving treated tap water
- Reduce Runoff— water is kept in your yard for when you need it rather than running off into the storm drain

Soil Moisture

When watering plants, an important question to ask is how much is enough?

To check soil moisture

- Check the day before watering
- Dig about 2– 4 in into the soil
- Squeeze the soil in your hand
 - If the soil sticks together and is moist, your plants should not be watered
 - If the soil crumbles and is dry, then it's time to water your plants

Gardening During a Drought



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Planting with Natives

Perennial Illinois native wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs are naturally drought resistant. Once they are established, no watering is needed. There is a vast diversity of native plants to choose from.

For a list of native plants see our Native Plants pamphlet.

Weeds

Weeds steal water from other plants. Some have deep tap roots, while others have short root systems— both types are aggressive and soak up the water they can. To avoid weeds and get water to the plants you want in your garden consider these tips:

- Mulch
- Hand pulling — this should be manageable in a reasonably sized yard. This has less impact on you, your family, and the environment than chemicals. But remember, a lawn and garden completely free of weeds is unnatural!

7 Principles of Xeriscaping

1. Planning and Design — consider the features of your backyard like contours and drainage patterns to maximize watering
 2. Soil Testing and Improvements — healthy soil promotes optimal drainage and storage of water
 3. Create Limited Turf Areas—turf grass is extremely water intensive, so aim to limit these areas while maintaining functionality
 4. Use Appropriate Plants — Native plants are best because they are naturally drought resistant, but other drought resistant plants work as well
 5. Mulch
 6. Efficient Irrigation — check out our watering tips
 7. Maintain Your Landscape — low maintenance is key, but don't forget to mulch, weed, and adjust watering schedules as the weather changes
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RainScaping Principles

1. Redirect your downspout to a planting bed
2. Plant more native trees, shrubs, and other plants
3. Install rain barrels and rain gardens
4. Replace pavement with porous surfaces

Mulch

Can be made up of various things such as dead leaves, partially composted vegetation, gravel, and wood shavings. The layer of mulch should be thick enough to completely cover the soil. Mulch then provides protection from the wind and drying effects of the sun. Mulching also helps:

- Inhibit weeds— which limits water stolen from plants you want in your garden
 - Keeps soil cool— eliminates the need to water every day
 - Helps water infiltration—water is cushioned by the mulch and the soil does not become as compacted, allowing water to deeply infiltrate the soil
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Rain Gardens

During a drought, it is important to keep water in your yard for as long as possible. Rain gardens can be planted in depressions in your yard where rain water collects. By planting native, deeply rooted plants, water is able to deeply infiltrate the soil, rather than simply being washed away into the storm drains.