

Water Conservation in the Garden

Now is a great time to re-evaluate how you conserve water in the garden and to see what improvements you can make. I am re-thinking parts of our garden to make better use of the trees and sheltered areas already there. I am also taking a ruthless approach - giving up on some plants which can't cope with our climate and re-designing our garden layout. Here is a check list to help you conserve water in your garden and to buffer it against long dry periods.



1. Look over your garden for cool areas (shade from plants or buildings, south facing) and dryer, hotter areas (exposed or north or west facing) to help you place plants with like water and heat protection needs together. Keep the ones that want more water close to the house so that they can receive the bucket of water you save from washing the vegies or at the start of the shower.
2. Protect from drying winds. How can you use what is already in place to protect your plants? What could you add? Consider fences, planting windbreaks, siting any new buildings usefully, and using shade cloth for short term protection.
3. Re-think the purpose of your lawn. Lawns take a lot of care and water to look their best but are handy for play and leisure activities. If it is just a visually low area you want, consider re-designing your garden to add a swathe of ground covers, a mulched nook with a restful seat, a deck or a paved or gravelled area.
4. Re-think the placement of your lawn and aerate it so that the water you put on it does not just run off. Shade from trees can help to slow evaporation.
5. Improve the water retention of your soil – add organic material and loosen the soil if it is compacted or has a crusty surface.
6. Create a drip irrigation system or use weeper hoses to take water to the base of the plants.
7. Use mulch to cover the surface of the garden beds and your watering system to slow evaporation. Use organic mulch such as pea straw, mushroom compost or chip bark or a living mulch such as a ground covers or a shrub with leaves and branches to the ground.
8. Mulch you pot plants too. Place them closely together in like water needs groups. Move them to a cooler spot.
9. Select plants which will do well with the amount of water that your climate generally provides. Research for appropriate plants, talk to local gardeners, look at what grows in your area (indigenous plants, other garden plants and street plantings).
10. Use the planting technique for dry weather – soak the planting hole three times to create a deep down reservoir for the roots to grow towards, include some organic matter as you fill in the hole to help retain water, create a well around the plant so that it will hold a good amount of water when you water it.
11. Only water when it is necessary. Look for signs of stress such as wilted leaves or check the moisture content of the soil by digging down a little way.
12. Water deeply less often. This helps the roots to grow down deep where they are better protected and prevents the water from evaporating so readily.
13. Water early in the cool of the day – less evaporation and less chance of creating a humid atmosphere. Evenings are next best. Leave midday watering for extreme weather events and stressed plants.

14. Plant vegetables close together with just enough room for them to develop. Plant taller vegies to shade shorter ones. Inter-plant quick crops between slower ones to cover the surface. Mulch with an organic material which will rot down and add nutrients.
15. Use tanks on your sheds as well as your house. Connect up grey water to go on the garden. Work on ways to save water inside the house that can be put on the garden. Use washing products that will not harm the environment.
16. Give up on struggling plants which want lots of water. Replace them with something hardier.

Happy gardening!

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