

According to the US EPA, the average family uses 400 gallons of water a day, and 1/3 of that is used for landscape irrigation. This brochure is a guide for more efficient and conservative garden and landscape watering, which is particularly useful in times of drought.

Wise Watering

Watering deeply and infrequently helps to promote deep roots for plants, which can help them 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 — rain barrels capture and store water to use during a drought to lessen stress on municipal water sources.

Clean and Safe — harvested rain water is safe for lawns, gardens, and potted plants, and is a great alternative to treated tap water.

Reduce Runoff — collecting rain water reduces roof and lawn stormwater runoff, decreasing non-source point pollution.

Soil Moisture

How much water is enough for your plants?

Determining soil moisture levels:

1. Check the day before watering
2. Dig about 2–4" into the soil
3. Squeeze the soil in your hand
 - If the soil sticks together and is moist, the plants do not need water
 - If the soil crumbles and is dry, it's time to water

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Gardening in a Drought



Find more Yard Smart recommendations at yardsmart.org

Yard Smart

Planting with Natives

Illinois native perennial wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs are naturally drought resistant. Once established, no watering is needed. There is a wide variety of native plants to choose from.

See *EAC's 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 significant water soaks. Avoid weeds and get water to your plants by utilizing mulch and hand pulling methods. 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!

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

Tips for Gardening

The Seven Principles of Xeriscaping

1. **Planning and Design**— consider the contours and drainage patterns of your backyard features to maximize watering
2. **Soil Testing and Improvements**— healthy soil promotes optimal drainage and water storage
3. **Create Limited Turf Areas**— turf grass is extremely water intensive, so limit these areas while maintaining functionality
4. **Use Appropriate Plants**— native plants are naturally drought resistant, but other drought resistant plants work as well
5. **Mulch**— mulch can help to reduce weeds, improve soil structure, and conserve water in your garden
6. **Water Efficiently and Infrequently**— giving your plants a sufficient amount of water without waste will help them to become deep-rooted and drought resistant
7. **Perform appropriate maintenance**— proper mowing, fertilizing, and elimination of small weeds will help to maintain the landscape

During a Drought

Mulch

There are multiple kinds of mulch: dead leaves, partially composted vegetation, gravel, and wood shavings. The layer of mulch should be thick enough to completely cover the soil. Mulch provides many benefits...

- Protection— fights the wind and drying effects of the sun
 - Inhibit weeds— which limits water stolen from your desired plants
 - 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. Plot and plant rain gardens in depressions in your yard where rain water collects. Planting native species with deep roots increases water absorption, rather than simply washing away into the storm drains.