

## Water Conscious Landscapes

Developing a comprehensive landscape plan for your property is a good place to start when wanting to redesign or create a new landscape. A thought-out plan will help you create and maintain a beautiful outdoor space that makes the most of existing landscape features while conserving water.

Some things to keep in mind when designing a water-efficient landscape are:

- Group plants in the landscape according to their water needs: low water use (fed primarily by rainwater), moderate water use (occasional watering), and high water use (regular watering).
- Use native and low-water-use plants. Native plants require less maintenance because they are more acclimated to the area and climate. Low-water-use plants are a good idea for areas that receive little rainfall.
- Use efficient irrigation systems. Irrigation methods such as drip or trickle irrigation use 25 to 50 percent less water and may be more appropriate than a sprinkler system.
- Provide healthy soil. Prepare the ground with these goals in mind: good drainage, smooth contours for even growth, rainwater detention for thirsty plants and good top soil. You should slope the ground away from buildings and grade to one inch below driveway or sidewalk level.

Maintaining your lawn is a big part of conserving water within your landscape. Using proper soil preparation and lawn maintenance practices helps build healthy soil and vigorous, deep-rooted lawns. These lawns are more resistant to disease, better tolerate insect and drought damage and will out-compete many weeds.

Consider the following tips for landscape maintenance and water conservation:

- Keep lawn areas to a minimum.
- Remove only one third of the grass length at each mowing. Mow weekly during the spring, and leave clippings on the lawn to provide free fertilizer, helping lawns grow greener and denser without causing thatch buildup. Keep the mower blade sharp and mow when the grass is dry.
- Mulch plants to retain soil moisture longer and reduce evaporation.
- Irrigate with the proper amount and only when necessary. Less frequent, but heavier lawn watering encourages a deeper root system to withstand dryer weather. Watering your lawn every day encourages shallow roots.
- Do not let water run down the driveway, or onto the street or sidewalk.
- Avoid watering on a windy day, as the water may be blown onto the sidewalk or areas other than your lawn or may evaporate quickly.
- Collect rain water in a barrel and use it to water your garden.
- Provide regular maintenance. If you see a leak in your irrigation system, fix it right away.
- Schedule irrigation wisely. Water in the early morning, before the hot sun comes out and evaporates the water.

Remember: what you do affects the quality and quantity of the water you drink and use. By keeping that in mind, you are helping protect water resources now and in the future. Help save Texas water and make every drop count.

