

Ways To Save Water:

Plants

1) Go native with your plantings.

Focus on growing drought-tolerant plants. Native plants are well-adapted to thrive in our area, having survived climate extremes for hundreds of years. If not natives, choose non-invasive, drought-tolerant perennial plants which can easily survive with less than an inch of water a week once established. Many of these species feature attractive silver and greyish-white foliage.

2) Create windbreaks.

Establishing shrubs or placing attractive fencing around vegetable gardens can shelter plants from wind and evaporative moisture loss and prevent soils from drying out as quickly.

3) Mulch like crazy.

Mulching helps to slow the evaporation of moisture from the soil and keeps the soil and roots cool and protected. Try to stick with organic mulches that slowly break down and add organic matter to the soil. Find out about free mulch available for pick-up from the county.

4) Keep weeds out of flower and vegetable gardens.

Weeds are notorious for stealing water away from other plants, so if you'll keep their populations in check, you won't have to water as often. With lawns, remove weeds by hand whenever possible to avoid tough competition.

5) Plants have it made in the shade.

Place water-loving plants in areas that receive shade in the afternoon. Even sun-loving plants will do fine provided they receive morning to mid-day light. In fact, the harsh afternoon sun isn't that great for most plants.

Did You Know?

- Did you know that landscape irrigation accounts for almost half of residential water use?
- A single lawn sprinkler spraying five gallons per minute uses 50% more water in just one hour than a combination of ten toilet flushes, two 5-minute showers, two dishwasher loads and a full load of clothes!



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Water Resources

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McHenry County Government

Water Resources



Outdoor Water Conservation

Every Drop Counts!

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Ways to Save Water: Outdoors!

1) Don't water until plants need it.

Far more plants die from over-watering than under-watering. For many garden plants, the best way to know if plants need water is to let your finger be the guide. Dig down several inches near the base of the plant. If the soil is bone dry, that's your cue to water. Also, when a plant begins to show signs of wilting, especially in the morning, it probably needs water.

2) Use a soil probe to test moisture.

For lawns, trees, and shrubs, a simple electronic probe can help measure soil moisture and indicate when you should water. On automatic sprinkler systems, install a moisture sensor. This is a probe placed in the ground that determines when the soil needs water and then turns on the sprinkler. It can save you buckets of both water and money.

3) Prioritize your watering needs.

During drought periods, conserving water could mean choosing which plants receive water – and which do not. Most lawns, except bluegrass, will simply go dormant if not watered. *Watering is not necessary and the grass will recover when rainfall returns!* Because a 5,000 sq. foot lawn needs up to 6,000 gallons of water per week to stay green – an expensive undertaking – it is easier to let lawns sleep through the drought than to waste water, money, and effort.

4) Help the neediest plants first.

Forget dramatic measures to save your lawn and concentrate your watering efforts on new plantings, vegetables, and tender annuals. Native plants and most perennials can normally wait until the next rainfall arrives.

5) Cover your swimming pool.

Covering your pool will significantly help to reduce evaporation. An average-sized pool can lose about 1,000 gallons of water per month if left uncovered. Pool covers can cut water losses by up to 90% while keeping water cleaner.

6) Use a broom to clean driveways and sidewalks.

Sweeping paved areas will get them clean without wasting gallons of water and washing organic matter and fertilizers into stormdrain systems and waterways.

7) Don't let water run while washing your car.

Get the car wet, then turn off the water while you wash the car down using a bucket of soapy water. Turn on the water again for a final rinse. Empty the bucket into a flower bed or garden area. To protect local streams, try to wash your car on the lawn itself so that no water is wasted. *Of course, during a drought, maybe it's best not to wash the car at all.* If you must, consider going to a carwash where water is reclaimed and recycled.

8) Water early in the morning.

Water when temperatures are mild and winds are calm, so less water will be lost through evaporation. Don't water at night! Evening applications can lead to fungal diseases.

9) Don't water if rain is in the forecast.

And don't water the wind. Wind causes water to evaporate quickly and blows water onto areas where it's not needed.

10) Check for leaks in pipes, hoses, hose connections, and faucets.

Even a tiny leak can translate into thousands of gallons of wasted water over a short period of time. Repair or replace any equipment leaking water immediately.

11) Use shut-off nozzles on hoses.

Use nozzles which completely turn off the water when you are not using it; they also help to more effectively direct water than using your finger to create a stream.

12) Don't water the pavement.

Position sprinklers so that water is aimed directly at lawn and garden areas rather than sidewalks, paths, driveways, or fences. If it doesn't grow, don't water it! Along paved areas it might be more efficient to water by hand.

13) Use mulch strips to contain watering areas.

Consider laying down an eight-inch buffer of mulch adjacent to sidewalks and curbs to reduce runoff and water waste.

14) Large drops mean less waste.

Use sprinklers that emit large droplets rather than a fine mist to reduce losses through evaporation.

15) Deep soak each time you water.

Many people water lightly and frequently, causing a shallow root system. Watering deeply and infrequently creates a healthy root system that is better equipped to withstand heat and drought.

16) Water without waste.

Stop watering whenever runoff occurs, especially on slopes or on compacted, dry soils. That may mean turning the water on and off in cycles to allow moisture to soak into the ground, but it beats watching the water flow down the street. The same is true when puddling occurs. Stop watering and allow moisture to penetrate into the soil before restarting.

17) Use watering cans, whenever possible.

When dealing with just a few patio plants, watering with a hose may actually put more water on the patio than in the containers as you move from plant to plant.

18) Install drip irrigation systems and soaker hoses.

Drip systems permit water to flow slowly to roots, encouraging strong root systems, while also cutting back the water lost to evaporation. These setups are ideal for flower and vegetable gardens, around trees and shrubs, and even in some container situations.

19) Capture and recycle rainwater.

Place rain barrels or buckets beneath your downspouts. 1,000 sq. ft. of roof surface will collect 420 gallons of water in every inch of rainfall. You can use rainwater to irrigate by hand or wash your car without any chemical residues.

20) Redirect water from downspouts.

Channel stormwater across lawns and into garden beds away from your house; consider "Rainscaping" by establishing a watershed-friendly garden which will use stormwater to thrive and create beauty around your home, school, or office.