

OUTDOOR WATER CONSERVATION TIPS

Finally, spring has sprung and summertime is on the way, and that means our water use is going to skyrocket. It is estimated that during the summer we use between two and four times as much water as we do the rest of the year. Overall, depending on where you live and how much watering you do, 30 — 70 percent of all the water we use at home is used outdoors. The best way to be sure you aren't wasting water is to follow some simple guidelines. If you don't, you may be wasting up to 50 percent of the water you are using outdoors due to inefficient watering methods and evaporation. Keep these tips in mind when you are using water outdoors:

Don't water your lawn or garden at the wrong time of the day. During the hottest part of the day you can lose a significant amount of the water you are applying to evaporation.

Water the lawn only when it needs it. Most lawns only need one inch of water each week. Pay attention to the weather and keep a rain gauge in the yard to help you monitor how much water you are getting. If you are planting a new lawn consider drought tolerant varieties such as Buffalo grass, Bermuda grass, and some varieties of St. Augustine grass. These varieties will go dormant during a drought and recover well when the rains begin again.

One way to tell if your lawn needs water is to step on the grass and see if it springs back. If it does you needn't worry about watering. Also, let the grass grow a little. By letting it grow longer it will shade the ground and roots and slow the evaporation rate.

In the garden, be sure to utilize mulch around your vegetable plants. A good layer of ground cover will allow the water to seep deeper into the soil and reduce loss due to evaporation.

Pools are very susceptible to evaporation, up to an inch and a half per day. It's not uncommon to have to add 2,000 gallons a month to a pool due to evaporation. The use of a pool cover can reduce evaporation by as much as 90 percent.

Another way to conserve water and reduce your water bill is to install a rain collection system and/or a drip irrigation system. These two systems alone or in tandem can save you thousands of gallons of water from your water bill. Both of these options can be kept simple or made as high tech and complex as you would like.

There are a variety of ways to collect rainwater from the roof of your home or barn to use at a later date when you need it to water your ornamentals or your vegetables. The simplest way to get started with a rainwater collection system is to simply put a cleaned barrel that has a spigot located near or on the bottom of the barrel (if on the bottom barrel must be raised) under a gutter downspout. You will collect approximately 0.6

gallons of water per square foot of roof surface. Keep just one barrel near your flower bed and when it gets dry out, you'll be ready to go.

With a drip irrigation system you will be able to apply a very specific amount of water to each plant individually when you water. You can purchase a basic all inclusive set-up at your local home improvement store for \$50—\$75. The starter kits typically come with a variety of components and between 50—100 feet of tubing to get you started.

Water wisely – every drop you save counts! Even though we seem very wet right now, remember just a few summers ago we experience a severe multi year drought. Develop good habits now to conserve water and it will be less painful when the next drought occurs.