Outdoor Water Conservation Tips

Tualatin Valley Water District

General Outdoor Conservation Tips

- Use a broom instead of a hose to clean your driveway and sidewalk.
- Wash your car at a car wash that recycles water or try using waterless car wash.
- If you wash your own car, use a hose nozzle and turn off the water while you soap up your car. Use phosphorous-free soap. It's better for the environment.
- Direct downspouts toward shrubs or trees.
- Bathe your pets outdoors in an area in need of water.
- Compost kitchen scraps, lawn clippings and garden waste - they're perfect for homemade compost, which your soil will love. It also helps retain water and reduces erosion and weed growth, which compete for water and nutrients. Metro and the Oregon DEQ both have excellent Web sites to get you started.

Sprinklers

- Select a sprinkler that releases water slowly and close to the ground rather than one that releases a mist that tends to evaporate quickly.
- Adjust sprinklers so you don't water the house, sidewalk, or street.
- Fix broken, clogged, sunken or tilted sprinkler heads.

Irrigation

- Efficient water use is especially important during the hot summer months when as much as 50 percent of home water use is for watering lawns and gardens.
- Water your lawn about 1” a week, including rain, in temperatures below 85 degrees. Hotter temperatures require 1 ½” of water per week for landscaping. As an easy rule-of-thumb, you can figure out how long it will take to get one inch of water by using the "Tuna Can Trick":
  1. Place 3 to 5 empty tuna or cat food cans at varied distances from the sprinkler.
  2. After 15 minutes, stop the water and check the water level in the tuna cans. If the cans are full, your lawn is properly watered. If they ran over, you're watering too much.
  3. Note the time it took to fill the cans and that's how long you should water your lawn.
- Use a timer when watering. It is easy to forget and over water.
- A hearty rain can eliminate the need for watering for up to two weeks -- add a rain sensor and make weekly changes to your irrigation controller to account for weather changes.
- Water your lawn in the early morning or in the evening, when temperatures are cooler and water isn't lost to evaporation. Don't water on windy days because water can be blown away from plants. If your sprinklers water the sidewalk, driveway or street, that can be another 300 gallons down the drain!
- Before watering, check the soil below the surface. Just because the surface is dry doesn't mean that the roots need water. There may be moisture below the surface. Better yet, our Weather-Based Irrigation Rebate includes soil moisture sensors!
- Water the roots and soil around plants rather than spraying the leaves and flowers.
- Deep soak your lawn. Water infrequently but thoroughly so that moisture soaks deep to the roots. This encourages deeper, healthier root systems and allows the lawn to go without irrigation for a longer period of time.
- Alternately, you may find that due to soil conditions or slopes in your yard, water will run off if you water for extended periods. Several short repeated watering cycles may be necessary to avoid runoff.
- Add soil amendments before you plant, such as compost or peat moss, to improve water retention and soil quality. Use mulch generously. It slows evaporation, keeps plant roots cooler and controls weeds.
- Adjust your mower to a higher setting. Consider leaving clippings on the lawn. Longer grass blades provide shade and help hold in moisture longer.

Landscape Maintenance

- All landscapes require regular maintenance. Pruning, efficient watering and pest control will keep plants healthy and your water bill lower. Weed regularly since weeds compete with your grass for water and nutrients. Fertilize only the minimum amount needed. Extra fertilizer actually increases water consumption.
- Once a year aerate your lawn, particularly if your soil is compacted. This will improve the lawn’s health and ability to absorb water.

Pool & Spas

- Install covers on pools and spas to reduce evaporation.
- Try to keep the water level of your pool halfway up the skimmer opening. Overfilling the pool stops the skimmer from working as well and wastes water.
- A pool cover is a great way to reduce evaporation and the need to regularly top up your pool's water level. Without a cover, more than half the water in your pool can evaporate over a year.
- Use a grease pencil to mark the level of your pool at the skimmer. Check it 24 hours later. Your pool should lose no more than 1/4 inch each day.

Planning for a Garden

- Water-smart planning starts with groups of plants according to water, sun and soil requirements and ends with reduced maintenance through the use of simple shapes. When planting new garden beds, group plants with similar watering needs together.
- If lawn is installed, consider using a drought-, disease- or wear-tolerant variety. Place it where it can be watered and maintained efficiently. Avoid placing lawns on slopes or in areas that are unused or are hard to maintain.
- Use native and/or adapted plantsthat will enhance the site and minimize long-term water consumption while keeping weeds and pests to a minimum. Also, take a look at Clean Water Services' Native Plant Finder!
- Group plants into high, moderate and low water-using zones. Take advantage of water captured in ponds, swales, rain barrels or cisterns for significant water savings. High-tech watering systems make watering easier, but not necessarily more efficient. If you install an automatic system, be sure to adjust for seasonal changes and consider using a rain or soil sensing shut-off switch.
- Watering more than your soil can absorb causes runoff. This not only wastes water, but also carries fertilizers and other chemicals into the sewer system. To avoid runoff, water in smaller amounts in repeated intervals.
- Visit our 1+ acre Demonstration Garden at 170th Ave and Merlo Rd in Beaverton. It is filled with great planting ideas you can use in your yard.