

Conserving water:

How to save water outdoors



The drought of record in the 1950's left Dallas thirsting for relief. Due to insufficient water supplies and the severe seven year drought, water was brought from the Red River and delivered to citizens from trucks. After that terrible time, Dallas citizens vowed never again. Over the years, good planning has assured adequate supplies of water. But as our population continues to grow, using that resource wisely is critical to our water supply availability.

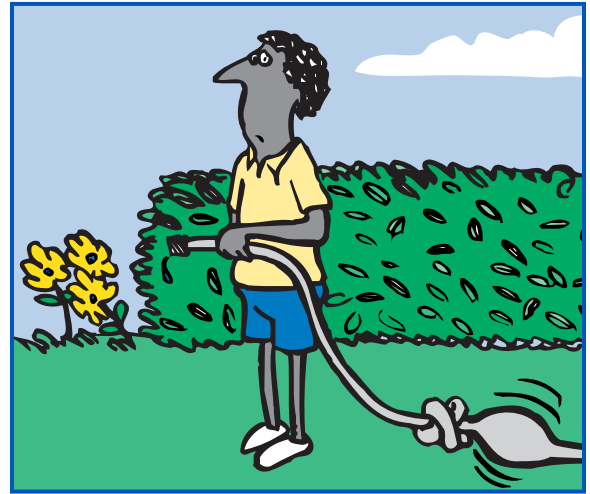
Water use - and water waste - are at their highest in the spring and summer. During these months, the average water use in Dallas doubles or triples as people pour water on their landscapes.

We can save a lot of water simply by improving our outdoor watering habits. And remember, whether it's used or wasted, you pay for every drop.

Most people water too much

If you are a typical homeowner, most of the area around your house is devoted to growing grass - and you're probably putting too much water on it. Studies show most lawns receive twice as much water as needed.

The first thing to do is learn when and how much to water your lawn. For most people, that will mean cutting back. Learning to water your lawn properly may take a little time initially. But learning how to water your particular landscape, will save you time and money in the future.



How much to water

Your goal in watering should be to get the water four to six inches deep in the soil. One to one-and-a-half inches per application will usually soak down four to six inches, even in the heavy clay soils of Dallas.

When to water

Please remember that the City of Dallas has a Water Conservation ordinance which prohibits watering between the hours of 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. from April 1 to October 31. The use of soaker hoses and hand watering are allowed at any time. For more information about the ordinance, go to www.savedallaswater.com or call the Conservation hotline at 214/670-3155.

It's best to water only after your lawn begins to show signs of stress. Look for discoloration and wilting. Your grass may take on a dark, dull appearance or the leaf blades may begin to roll or fold. A sure sign that your lawn needs water is when footprints remain visible after you've walked across it.

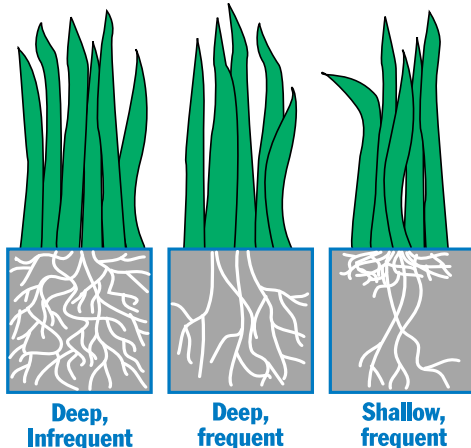
Conditions that affect the need for water vary, so it's best to water when you see that your lawn needs it, rather than watering on a set schedule. Homeowners with automatic sprinkler systems should consider operating their systems manually, only using their automatic timer when they will be out of town. Generally speaking, grasses need water at these intervals:

Grass	How often
Buffalo grass	Every two to three weeks
Bermuda	Every seven to 10 days
St. Augustine	Every five days
Tall Fescue	Every four days

Deep and infrequent watering is best

If there were to be just one rule of lawn-watering, it would be to water deeply and infrequently. Deep is four to six inches deep; infrequent is when your grass signals that it needs water.

Light, frequent applications of water produce a weak, shallow-rooted turf that cannot withstand heat and drought. By watering at the proper depth when your lawn needs it, you encourage deep, healthy roots that can endure dry summers, winter freezes, pests and disease.



How to know how much water you've applied

How can you know if your lawn has received the right amount of water? Measure it.

On a windless day, set a few empty cans or glasses of the same size in a straight line at various distances from the sprinkler (make sure all cans are within the spray pattern). Run the sprinkler long enough to put an inch of water in your containers. Tuna cans work very well because their sides are an inch tall.

This experiment establishes your future watering needs. By timing how long your sprinklers were on, you'll know how long to run them in order to get the right amount of water on your lawn.

Don't water too much at once

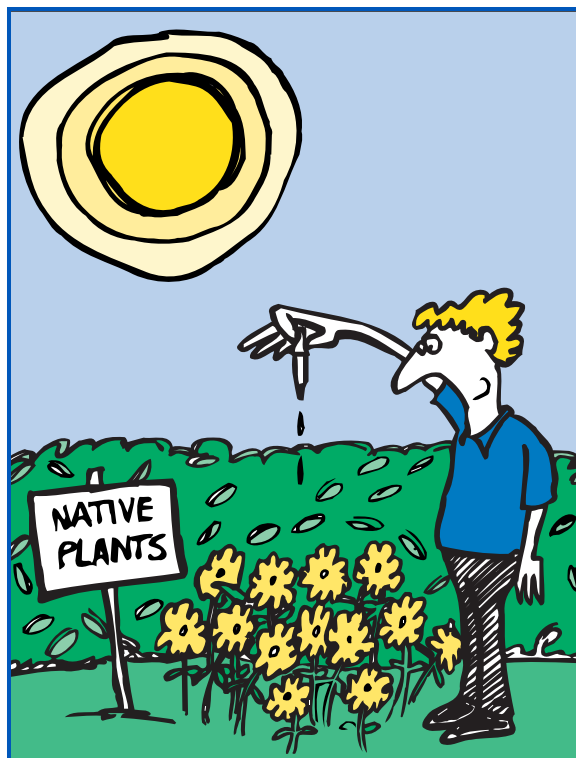
You're likely to learn something else important in experimenting with your sprinkler: your soil may not take that much water at once.

In watering your lawn, don't apply water to the point of run-off. In addition to wasting water, this practice is in violation of the City's Water

Conservation ordinance. If the sprinkler is applying water faster than the soil can absorb it, move the sprinkler to a new location and come back after the water has soaked in (usually 30 minutes or more). Or turn the sprinkler off, and then back on until enough water has been applied. Water that runs off your lawn to a sidewalk or street is wasted.

Make it easy for water to get to the roots

Aerate your lawn once a year to make it easier for water to get to the desired depth. It's best to use a device that actually removes a plug of soil rather than just poking a hole in the ground.



Other ways you can save water outside

1 Use plants that are native or adapted to this area. Native plants are the trees, shrubs, flowers, ground covers and grasses that grow naturally in this region. They've been here for many thousands of years, surviving droughts, scorching heat, freezing cold, insects, diseases and everything else nature has thrown at them. Once established, these plants will thrive on the amount of moisture they typically get from rainfall each year, and they'll require less maintenance from you.

Adapted plants are non-native plants that work well in a particular area because they are naturally suited to that environment. For instance,

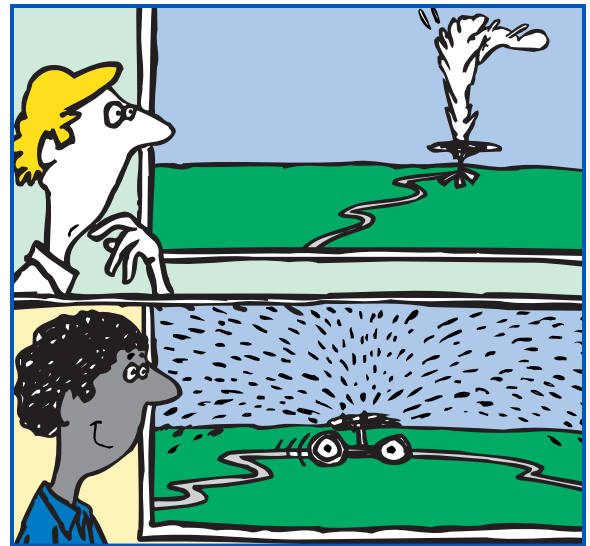
crape myrtles, nandina and Asian jasmine are not native to the Dallas area, but they certainly thrive here.

Ultimately, there is no better way to save water than to replace traditional landscape plantings with attractive and hardy native or adapted plants.

If you can't resist using more high maintenance and thirsty plants in your landscape, keep them together in a higher water "oasis zone" close to your home. This will make it easier to add supplemental water by hand as these plants need it. Use more drought tolerant plants in a "transitional zone" and use the extremely drought tolerant native or adapted plants around the perimeter of your property. This "water zoning" will keep each type of plants healthy and save water.

2 Consider reducing turf area. Lawns are good for recreation, entertainment and creating a cool green space around a home. But lawns are also the largest water user in most home landscapes, so you might want to replace some areas with decks, patios or beds of perennials, wildflowers or ground covers.

3 Water early in the morning, when sun and wind are less intense and will steal less water through evaporation. Water losses are as much as 50 percent less between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m. as they are in the afternoon. And please remember the Water Conservation ordinance - no watering with sprinklers between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. from April 1 through October 31.



4 Use a sprinkler that throws big drops of water close to the ground for the greatest watering efficiency. The design of some sprinklers - especially those that throw mist or small droplets of water high in the air - causes them to lose as much as 70 percent of their water to evaporation on hot, windy days.

5 Use drip irrigation and soaker hoses where appropriate. Both significantly reduce evaporation and run-off. They also encourage deep root growth. Drip irrigation in your garden or at the base of your trees and shrubs can save as much as 60 percent of the water normally used.

6 Mulch around trees, shrubs and in flower beds with a two-to four-inch layer of tree bark, leaves, straw, compost or other materials. Mulching protects the soil from heat, reduces evaporation, holds in moisture and discourages weed growth. You won't need to water as often or as much with a good layer of mulch.

Water Conservation Resources

Web sites

City of Dallas Water Conservation
www.savedallaswater.com

Texas SmartScape
www.txsmartscape.com

Texas A&M University
Plant answers (including turf grass)
www.plantanswers.com
Texas Superstar Plants
www.texassuperstar.com

Brochures

Natural Beauties

A Guide to Native and Drought Tolerant Plants That Thrive in North Texas With Minimal Watering

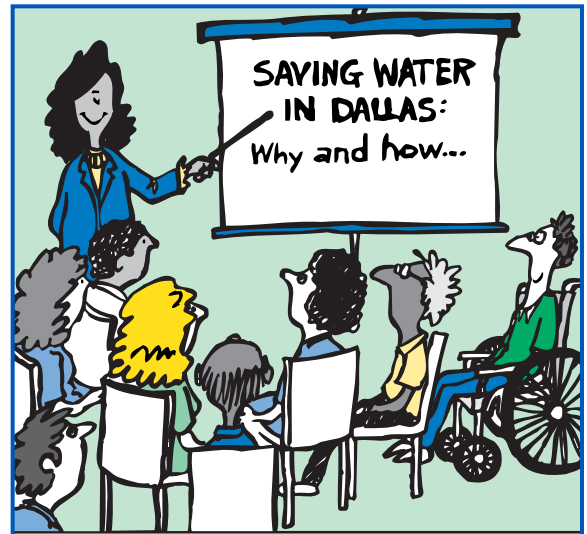
*Conserving Water:
Installing a Low-flow Showerhead*

*Conserving Water:
Training Your Toilet to Use Less
25 Ways to Save Water & Money*

To request a brochure, call us at
214/670-3155

Or request by mail at:
Dallas Water Utilities, Conservation Division
1500 Marilla, Room 2AN
Dallas, TX 75201

Or request the brochures on-line at
www.ci.dallas.tx.us/forms/water_conservation_contact.html.



Speakers

Speakers and presentations on water conservation are available from Dallas Water Utilities.

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Publication No. 06/07-31

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