

Water Wise Landscapes

Water-wise landscape design and management focus on working with nature and natural processes (such as rainfall) to create an aesthetically pleasing, livable landscape, while using less water.

Minimizing the need for irrigating landscape can be easy but it requires careful observation, planning and common sense. Principles for water-wise landscaping include choosing the best design and plants, preparing soils and watering efficiently.

Before you jump into your landscaping project, envision how you want your yard to look:

- Do you need a deck with lots of room for entertaining?
- Do children need a large open area for romping?
- Are you a backyard vegetable gardener?
- Do you need privacy? How much?
- Where are the sunny and shady areas? Look for existing rocks, slopes, drainage areas, structures and plants.

Plant Selection: Plant selection and placement are key elements in conservation landscaping. The use of low water-use plants is only one aspect of water-saving landscaping. Plants with higher water requirements may be used sparingly if they are grouped and watered together by area. You should avoid placing these plant types in hot, sunny areas of your landscape.

Low-Volume Irrigation: Drip or low-volume irrigation sprayers are the most efficient way to water your landscape. With a low-volume irrigation system, water is delivered slowly and directly to the roots of the plants, resulting in healthier plants, fewer weeds and less runoff and water waste.

Irrigation Management: Consider installing weather-based irrigation controllers, otherwise known as smart irrigation controllers, which use current weather information to create appropriate irrigation schedules. However, technology such as weather-based irrigation controllers and low-volume irrigation won't save water if the system is not maintained. Protect your investment by following these tips:

- Know how to manually run each irrigation valve and perform a system check for clogs and breaks at least four times a year.
- Ensure spray irrigation does not hit hardscape, decks or fences.
- Ensure the back-up battery in your controller is not dead. Check it once a year. Power outages can cause high water-use if the irrigation controller uses the default schedule. Consider buying an irrigation controller that has a non-volatile memory.

The City of Santa Cruz and Soquel Creek Water District offer customers a variety of free publications full of useful information on water-wise gardening to help you plan the most attractive, efficient, and water wise landscapes. Come by our offices or visit our websites at www.cityofsantacruz.com or www.soquelcreekwater.com and submit an electronic request for materials.



When in doubt, consider hiring a pro! The California Landscape Contractors Association and Green Gardener Programs are great resources. For more information on watering efficiently and to locate a Green Gardener in your area, visit www.green-gardener.org.



Improve Water-Use Efficiency — Request a Free Home Survey

Are you concerned about summer water bills in the upper charge tiers? Would you like to use less water during the irrigation season? The City of Santa Cruz and Soquel Creek Water District can help you use water more efficiently, both indoors and out, with free water use surveys. Surveys provide customers with customized water efficiency tips, leak identification and irrigation advice. Our trained surveyors will come to your home or business and:

- Evaluate the efficiency of your irrigation system.
- Provide you with a personalized irrigation schedule, if appropriate.
- Identify irrigation leaks, broken or mismatched sprinkler heads, high pressure and other common problems.
- Provide water conservation materials and water-wise landscaping tips.
- Evaluate indoor water use and other ways to save.

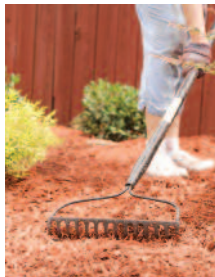
To schedule an appointment, City of Santa Cruz customers may call (831) 420-5230 and Soquel Creek Water District customers may call (831) 475-8500.

Outdoor Water Saving Tips

By using water-efficient landscape techniques, you can maintain a thriving, beautiful garden while cutting summer water use significantly. Here are some things you can do to reduce outdoor water use and keep your landscape looking nice:

1. Restrict turf to areas that are high use, like play areas, and choose a low-water use variety. If possible, skip the turf altogether and plant water wise plants or install artificial turf. Turf grass is one of the most water and labor-intensive types of vegetation you can have.
2. Add organic matter to your soil to improve its texture and water-holding capacity.
3. Use drip irrigation to deliver water directly to the roots of plants. This minimizes evaporation loss and keeps the areas between plants dry, which helps limit weed growth.

4. Use a generous layer of organic mulch to cut water needs in half by reducing evaporation and smothering thirsty weeds.



5. Collect and use rainwater or install a graywater system to irrigate plants.
6. Group plants that have similar water needs. Also, plan before you plant to take advantage of site characteristics such as sun, shade, wind and soil.
7. Choose plants that are naturally adapted to our local climate and are water-thrifty.
8. Take good care of your plants. Healthy plants tend to need less water, fertilizer and pest control than stressed plants.

Rainwater Harvesting: Rain Barrels and Cisterns



Rainwater harvesting is the capture, diversion and storage of rainwater from surfaces (rooftops, parking areas, etc.) to be commonly used for irrigating landscapes. There are many benefits to harvesting rainwater. In addition to saving water, rainwater harvesting can also reduce off-site flooding and erosion during storm events. Since rainwater does not typically contain salts, it is also beneficial for plants and helps reduce the salt content in soils.

The downside of rainwater harvesting in our Mediterranean climate is that there is typically little or no rain from May – October when irrigation occurs. Storing sufficient rainwater to cover needs through the dry season can be problematic unless you have unlimited space.

Rainwater can be harvested using rain barrels and larger water tanks, commonly known as cisterns. Rain barrels are small-to medium-sized containers that are capable of holding 50-100 gallons. They are placed outside buildings and connected to roof downspouts to collect rainwater for later use. Since individually they take up very little space, are inexpensive, and relatively easy to install, they can be useful in urban settings. One barrel won't go far towards meeting average summer irrigation demands, but combine the storage of several barrels and a water smart garden to make it last longer.

Cisterns are larger tanks that can be installed both above and, in some cases, below ground. They are also connected to

roof downspouts and can be used to supply non-potable water for residential, commercial and industrial needs.

Both rain barrels and cisterns can be used by taking advantage of gravity flow, eliminating the need for pumps in most cases. Some general guidelines that apply to the use of barrels and cisterns include:

- Keeping them covered to ensure they don't allow access for children, pets, mosquitoes or rodents.
- Installing screens on containers and downspout openings to prevent debris from entering.
- Performing routine maintenance to remove leaves and debris collected on screens and to ensure the overflow is clear and directed to an appropriate location (i.e., where it will not cause erosion or drain into a building's foundation).

There are also some circumstances in which rainwater harvesting should not be implemented:

- On cedar or highly degraded rooftops.
- On roof areas prone to large amounts of leaf litter, pine needles, bird droppings and other debris.
- On steep hillsides.

It is also important to note that rainwater harvesting may require a backflow prevention device and/or a permit from your local planning department, depending upon the type, size and proposed location of the collection device. Contact your local planning department for more details on permitting requirements.

For more information, visit:
www.harvestingrainwater.com/
www.rcdsantacruz.org/
www.sccoplanning.com/html/bldg/need_bp.htm



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More information is available at:
www.scwd2desal.org

Esta información está disponible en español.
Por favor llame al (831) 475-8500.