



Water Wisely: Start in your own backyard

Quick tips

- Select plants that will thrive in existing soil type, light, and space.
- Collect and use rainwater to water plants.
- Water evergreens until the ground freezes.
- Water in early morning to allow leaves to dry and reduce diseases.
- Mulch plants to conserve moisture.
- Use sensors and smart controllers on automated irrigation systems.
- Water deeply, but less often, to encourage root growth and drought tolerance.

Water is a precious resource needed by all living things. If you care for a yard or garden, you can help protect water resources by being wise about watering practices, starting in your own backyard.

Much of our treated drinking water is also used for landscape irrigation, so it pays to reduce water use and protect our supply by being wise about landscape watering practices at home.



Although all plants need water to be healthy and grow, some, like lawns, need less water than we think. While others, like trees, need more.

Knowing the what, when, where and how of watering in your garden or landscape is key to growing healthy plants and conserving our precious water supply.

Tips for maintaining healthy garden beds

What to water:

- Choose plants that will thrive in your existing soil type, light, space.
- Know which plants require consistently moist soil and those that prefer drier conditions.
- Note microclimates: dry shade, windy areas, poor drainage.

When to water:

- Early morning to allow leaves to dry and reduce foliar diseases.

- Feel the top 6 inches of soil. Dry? Time to water.

How and where to water:

- Water the base of plants to avoid getting leaves wet and reduce foliar diseases.
- Layout soaker hoses or drip irrigation in early spring as plants emerge.
- Water deeply and less often to promote deeper, healthy roots.

Conserve water:

- Collect and use rainwater.
- Choose drought-tolerant plants that require less water.
- Add 2 to 3 inches of organic mulch to conserve moisture in the soil and protect roots.
- Amend soil with compost to increase soil's water-holding capacity.

Rain barrels in the home landscape

Watering the vegetable garden

Tips for maintaining healthy shrubs and trees

- Select drought-tolerant shrubs:
 - sumac, alpine currant, buffaloberry, spirea, ninebark, potentilla, smoke bush, gray dogwood, common bearberry, black chokeberry, forsythia, junipers
- Select drought-tolerant trees:
 - amur corktree, ginkgo, hackberry, Kentucky coffeetree, honeylocust, tree lilac, bur oak, American bayberry
- Newly planted shrubs and trees require regular watering until they are established.
- Apply water to the root ball once a week.
- Water established shrubs and trees when the top 6 to 9 inches of soil dry out.

Watering established trees and shrubs

Watering newly planted trees and shrubs

Tips for maintaining a low maintenance lawn

- Set your mower at 2.5 inches or higher to promote deeper roots.
- Water only when it is necessary.
- If watering is required, it is best to water between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m. to reduce water loss due to evaporation or wind.
- Water deeply and infrequently.

- Depending on soil type and air temperature, lawns need only a quarter inch to one inch of water (minus any rainfall) per week.
- Sandy soils may need to be watered 2–3 times per week but with less volume each time.
- Clay soils need to be watered only 1 time per week.
- Install a rain sensor, a soil moisture sensor or a smart irrigation controller as part of your automated sprinkling system to reduce over-watering.
- Use drought-tolerant turfgrasses to conserve water.

Water-saving strategies for home lawns

Is your home lawn irrigation system working properly?

Resources for watering wisely in any situation

The Best Plants for 30 Tough Sites is a downloadable publication offering solutions for locations that call for tough, durable plants. Included are plant lists of special traits and useful characteristics such as self-seeding, fragrance, long-blooming, and minimal litter trees.

The **Upper Midwest home gardening calendar** shows recommended timing for everything you need to do to grow great flower and vegetable gardens in Minnesota.

The **Minnesota lawn care calendar** is a handy schedule of activities that will help you keep your lawn healthy throughout the year.

Building a rain garden — A rain garden is a planted low area that allows rainwater runoff to soak in from hard surfaces like roofs, driveways, walkways and parking lots. A rain garden:

- Removes pollutants from water before they enter surface waters.
- Prevents erosion by holding soil in place with its deep roots.
- Attracts birds and butterflies.
- Requires little watering and maintenance once established.

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<https://extension.umn.edu/how/water-wisely-start-your-own-backyard>

