



Riverview Garden Club Helpful Hints

July 2018

Usually by July, the hottest time of summer, rain is not adequate to water our gardens sufficiently. Sometimes restrictions are put on watering by the local towns to conserve water. Here are a few ways to conserve or reuse “gray water” which is gently used household water, not sewage. Collect it by saving dishwater, filling a bucket while waiting for the shower to run warm, running a drain hose from your washing machine to trees outside the house, or even by installing a complete wastewater capture system.

When watering is possible, water your garden in early morning. Temperatures are still cool and the sun is low, meaning you lose less moisture to evaporation. The way you water plants is important too. Watering by hand can lead to runoff, and using an overhead sprinkler means more water is lost to evaporation. A drip irrigation system or soaker hose is best. Both are efficient and easy to use.

Another thought is to wait to plant until autumn. This is especially good with permanent plants such as trees, shrubs, and perennials. Temperatures are generally cooler, meaning water requirements will be less. While top growth slows, roots will be developing and getting established until the coldest weather comes.

To retain what moisture nature gives us, dig compost into your soil to encourage healthy root growth. Then mulch the beds with an organic material such as wood chips. Mulch slows the evaporation of ground moisture and helps keep soil temperatures lower, reducing stress on plants. Also, natural mulches break down slowly over time adding valuable organic matter to the soil and will control weeds which means less competition in your garden for available water.

One inch of rain falling on a 1,200 square foot roof adds up to more than 748 gallons of fresh water. Instead of letting it run down the driveway and into the street, keep it for your thirsty plants. Use downspout attachments that direct the water into your flower beds.

Choose heat loving plants that enjoy hot and sunny conditions. Cacti and succulents are good choices, especially for containers, because they will require significantly less watering. They take up water when it is available and do their growing and blooming then. When it is dry they grow more slowly and conserve water in their tissues. Many other shrubs and perennials have adapted to environments with prolonged dry spells. Perennials that are heat and drought tolerant include yarrow, blanket flower, Agastache, sedum, Russian sage, lavender, lamb's ears, purple coneflower, and Amsonia.

If you apply fertilizers (organic or synthetic), it is helpful to stop at the onset of a drought. Fertilizers encourage plant growth. The more a plant grows, the more moisture it needs. If fertilizer salts build up in your soil because they are not naturally leaching out with rain or irrigation, they can build up and burn plant roots causing further damage.

It might not be fun to pull weeds but getting those weeds out of the garden is especially important during drought as weed roots steal valuable moisture from the soil.

Enjoy your summer, keep cool, relax, and enjoy your gardens.



---Sandy