

# Water Conservation Saves A Natural Resource and Money

According to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), we may waste as much as half of the water we use around the house during the summer months when 50 to 80 percent of our water consumption is used outside. Using this valuable resource more efficiently can save both water and money.

How do you use water for lawn and garden? When, and for how long do you water the lawn? Does the sprinkler hit the driveway, sidewalks or street? Does your sprinkler system turn off automatically when it rains? Do you wait for the plants or grass to look wilted before watering, or do you water on a regular basis?

We have always taken our water resources for granted, but with the Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District mandate to reduce our dependency on groundwater, people are more interested in using our water supplies more efficiently to control costs, too.

Here are some simple tips to help you put a realistic, cost-effective water efficiency plan into effect outside your home.

**Use native plants** and shrubs whenever possible in landscaping your yard. They generally require watering less frequently, and are often low-maintenance, too. The Texas Department of Agriculture County Extension Service points out that different varieties of grasses, plants and soils require different amounts of water.

In Houston, for example, St. Augustine grass has a high “thirst” requirement. Experts suggest that **grass should be watered separately from flower beds and landscaped areas**. When original landscape planning is an option, “zone” plants according to their water requirements.

**Use the kind of watering equipment to suit your “target.”** Use sprinklers – ones that broadcast large drops are best – for the lawn areas, and soaker hoses or drip irrigation systems for trees, shrubs and flower beds.

**Know when to water.** Look for signs of stress – limp or curled, dull green blades of grass, or footprints left behind after walking across the lawn. In Houston, watering every five days -- to deliver 3/4 to 1 inch of water (subtracting any rainfall) during summer months will wet the soil to a depth of 4-6 inches.



**Water during early morning or evening hours** when evaporation losses will be less than during the heat of the day. Avoid watering in high winds that might send the droplets to places they are not needed, like streets or driveways.

**Don't cut the grass too short.** Longer blades will help reduce evaporation and shade the soil.

**Use a good mulch layer** in flower beds and landscape areas. This helps to hold down weed growth that can siphon off water from your plants, and helps retain the moisture in the soil. “Zoning” plants according to their water requirements in your landscape plan can also help you water more efficiently.

Finally, **use drip or trickle irrigation** – the slow, frequent application of small amounts of water to the soil area directly surrounding the plant roots – to take care of gardens and landscaped areas. Drip irrigation can save up to 60 percent of water delivered by other systems.

By using our water supplies efficiently, we can hold down our water bills -- and minimize the long-term impact on our pocketbooks as this valuable resource becomes more costly in the years ahead. 💧