



FACT SHEET

Help Your Yard Survive the Drought

Our yards provide an enjoyable place to relax and play, and represent a significant investment. Enhanced quality of life, environmental benefits and preserving property values make our landscapes worth protecting – especially in a drought year. It is possible to keep your yard healthy during a drought and still do your part to conserve water. Following are easy, practical tips provided by plant and landscape experts to help your yard survive the drought.

Tip #1: Water only if your plants need it

If you live in a community enacting mandatory or voluntary watering restrictions, it's tempting to use all the water you can on your designated days. However, it is important to water only if the plants need it.

Spring is a good time to apply supplemental water to encourage deep root growth for lawns. The best way to do that is to soak the grass well and then wait a few days – even up to a week – before you water again.

Deep, infrequent watering will train the plants' roots to grow deeper, and more robust, and it helps them survive the hotter temperatures in July and August. Frequent watering, on the other hand, should be avoided as it keeps roots near the top of the soil, where they will dry out more quickly in the heat.

In July and August, it is best to water in 3-4 cycles for about 5 minutes each, allowing 15 minutes in between cycles for soils to absorb the water. Watering times vary by sprinkler type, so be sure you are applying the proper amount. Refer to the chart below to determine how long you should water based on your sprinkler type.



*Most spray heads disseminate approximately 2 inches of water per hour.
Most rotor sprinklers disseminate approximately 1/3 of an inch per hour.*

Most importantly, check your soil before you water. An easy way to check soil moisture is by inserting a screwdriver in the soil. If it is easy to push in, do not water (note: with sandy soil you may still need to water even if the screwdriver inserts easily). If the screwdriver is hard to push in, water according to the seasonal requirements following your water provider's guidelines.

Tip #2: Learn how to program your sprinkler timer



Become familiar with the programming feature of your sprinkler system or hire a professional to help you program it. Setting the system once for the entire season is not recommended. Settings should be adjusted and reset throughout the season to mirror warmer and cooler weather patterns. To avoid watering during a rainstorm, install a rain sensor that will automatically shut off the system.

If you are redesigning your yard, rethink your existing sprinkler system to better meet your plants' needs and reduce water usage. If you are installing a new system, design it right from the start. The system should water lawns and shrub/perennial beds separately. Drip irrigation systems are the most effective and efficient way to water trees, shrubs, flowerbeds and gardens. Whenever possible, take advantage of new water-efficient sprinkler technology. It is also very important to conduct ongoing maintenance of the system to repair leaks, broken heads and nozzles.

Tip #3: Amend soil and add mulch

Healthy, productive soil more readily absorbs moisture. Improve sandy or clay soils prior to planting with 3-5 cubic yards of organic matter (compost, not topsoil) per 1,000 square feet of an area to be seeded, planted or sodded. Till the compost to a depth of 4-6 inches. Apply mulch, such as wood chips or bark, 3-4 inches deep on top of flowerbeds, gardens and around trees.



Tip #4: Aerate and mow wisely

Aerate in the spring or fall with a core-aerating machine. Aeration opens up the soil so it can take in the moisture and nutrients that keep lawns healthy.

Mow traditional turf grass to a height of 3 inches, and never cut off more than one-third of the total height of the grass. Keeping grass at optimal length allows it to retain moisture so you can water less. Leaving clippings on the grass can improve the soil and lawn health.

Tip #5: Plant the right plants in the right place



When you select plants, choose the right plant for the right place. Plants with low water requirements that are suited for Colorado's climate will do better in drought years. Many nurseries carry Plant Select® and X-rated, which are chosen for their ability to thrive in the unique conditions of Rocky Mountain gardens. Ask the nursery or garden staff for advice.

When you plant, cluster plants together with similar sunlight and watering requirements and avoid overplanting as it leads to water waste. Healthy plants will better weather the drought and be more resistant to pests.

Tip #6: Remember to water your trees

Trees are one of the most valuable assets in a landscape. A tree's roots grow horizontally and can spread 2-4 times wider than the height of the tree, and wider than the tree's canopy. Water should be applied within the entire canopy of the tree. Water deeply and slowly to many locations under the canopy. To assure the survival of a tree, apply 10 gallons of water for each inch of the tree's diameter per watering. Apply mulch within the canopy at a depth of 3-4 inches, leaving 6 inches between the mulch and trunk.



Red indicates area under the canopy to water.



For more information:

Green Industries of Colorado – www.greenco.org
Industry Best Management Practices and conservation resources

Plant Select – www.plantselect.org
Water-wise plants suitable for the Rocky Mountain region

CWCB Drought Response Portal – www.coh2o.co
Drought conditions and state-wide watering restrictions

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