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Water**

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## Water efficient gardening

Your guide to using water wisely  
in and around your garden

Your garden is the place where you have an ideal opportunity to use water wisely, are you doing all you can to make yours water friendly? This leaflet aims to help you find ways of reducing the amount of tap water you use in your garden, for the good of your garden and the wider environment.

Did you know your garden actually prefers rainwater to tap water?

And did you know that a garden sprinkler uses around 15 litres of water per minute?

In just one hour, it gets through almost as much water as the average person would use in a week.

There are 5 basic methods for reducing the amount of water you use in your garden:

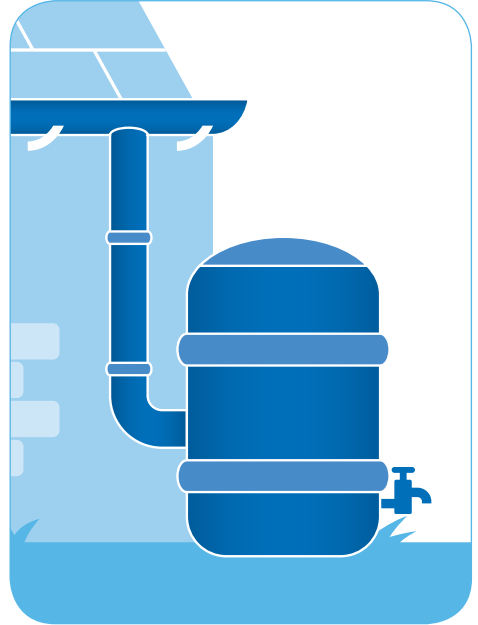
- 1 target water accurately and efficiently**
- 2 consider other water sources**
- 3 reduce water loss from soil surface**
- 4 increase infiltration with earthworks**
- 5 improve soil's water-retentive properties**

## 1. Target water accurately and efficiently

- Use a watering can instead of a hosepipe to water your plants – it's more accurate, placing the water where it is most needed.
- Save time and effort as well as water. Water your garden thoroughly and occasionally, rather than little and often, giving the soil around the plants a good soaking to make sure it reaches the roots at depth and prevents the development of shallow root systems.
- Don't follow a fixed watering schedule, water only when it is needed. Over-watering can wash nutrients out of the soil.
- Direct water at the roots, not over the leaves.
- Group thirsty plants together to reduce the effort of watering during dry spells.
- Some tubs come with water gauges, or you can get gauges as an add-on kit, so you'll know exactly which plants need watering.
- Plants that look like they need watering may be suffering from lack of nutrients, or they could be in the wrong type of soil.
- Keep on top of the weeding. Weeds use the water meant for your plants.

## 2. Consider other water sources

- Plants prefer rainwater to tap water, so the more rainwater you can store in your garden the better. An average of 85,000 litres of rainfall falls on your roof every year. This rain can be diverted back into your garden using a water butt. Easy to fit to downpipes, water butts can be used to collect water from any sloping roof – house, shed, greenhouse.
- If you have a pond, use rainwater to top it up during hot dry spells. The chlorine or chloramine in tap water isn't good for fish and other pond life.
- Recycle and reuse washing up water. It can be used on the garden quite safely providing you use an eco-friendly washing up liquid. You can alternate between this grey water and clean water (e.g. rainwater) for watering your plants/garden.



## 3. Reduce water loss from soil surface

- Mulching (placing a protective cover over the soil around a plant) greatly reduces the rate of evaporation from the soil's surface. Use a 2" (5 cm) layer of organic mulch (e.g. bark) to help hold in moisture.
- Deep cultivation encourages deep roots, which makes plants less reliant on you watering them.
- Weed control fabric (or permeable membrane) will allow water through to the soil but slow the rate of evaporation. It also suppresses weeds. Cut holes in it for planting and cover with a decorative mulch.

## 4. Increase infiltration with earthworks

- Plant in shallow pits or make a small dam on the downhill side of plants. This will retain water around the plant and give it longer to infiltrate the soil.
- If the site slopes steeply, consider constructing terraces to reduce runoff. This is also a good way of breaking the garden into different areas.

## 5. Improve soil's water-retentive properties

- A 'blocky' soil structure (blocks of soil with horizontal and vertical cracks) gives a good rate of infiltration and allows healthy root development as water can penetrate it.
- Adding organic matter, such as manure or compost, to the soil improves structure, helps to hold moisture and provides nutrients for plants. Compost kitchen and garden waste and dig the compost into borders and beds.
- Mix in a commercial water-retaining gel, this is particularly useful in containers and in light, free-draining soils.



## Lawns

- Don't mow the lawn too short or too often – it will need more water.
- Consider having a 'mixed' lawn. Instead of fighting the 'weeds' allow plants such as clover and daisies to grow with the grass, they stay green longer during dry spells and the flowers encourage pollinating insects.
- Using a sprinkler not only wastes water but it encourages shallow root growth, leaving your grass at risk of drought, which in turn means you need to water it more. If you have to use a sprinkler (e.g. when seeding a lawn) use one with a timer switch and don't use it during windy weather – the water evaporates much quicker.

## Ways to use every drop wisely

- Don't water the garden on a hot day as most of it will simply evaporate, instead water in the evening or early morning.
- Use a brush to clean paths, patios and driveways, instead of a hose.
- A dripping tap wastes at least 15 litres a day. Often a new washer is all you need to fix a leaking tap – check your outside tap for drips and replace a worn-out washer.
- In case of a burst, make sure everyone in your household knows where the internal stop valve (tap) is and that they can turn it on and off. It is usually under the sink, but could be in the hall, bathroom or garage.
- Fit insulation to exposed water pipes to prevent them freezing and bursting.
- If you can, shut off the supply to your outside tap during the winter and drain it. If there's no water in the pipe, it can't freeze and burst.

## Other good garden tips

- Help to keep your plants healthy, and reduce your chemical use in the garden, by growing plants with flat open flowers that attract predator species like the hoverfly or ladybird – they love to eat sap-sucking aphids, like greenflies. Or make a wildlife pond – frogs or toads will soon colonise it, and they eat slugs.
- Lay comfrey leaves around plants as mulch. Not only will they reduce evaporation from the soil, but they also act as a decoy for slugs – they love them. (Strangely, comfrey doesn't work on slugs after June.)

## Water saving plants

A wide variety of plants thrive in drier conditions\*. Look out for these tell-tale signs to help you spot some of them at the garden centre:

- Hairy leaves (e.g. sage) reduce evaporation due to air movement
- Very small leaves (e.g. lavender) reduce the surface area of the leaf
- Waxy leaves (e.g. holly) reduce the amount of water lost from the leaf surface
- Fat leaves (e.g. seagrass) store water for use during dry spells



There are other suitable plants that don't display these characteristics. Try some from this list to get you started:

**Allium**

**Alyssum**

**Buxus**

**Cytisus**

**Erysimum**

**Genista**

**Geranium**

**Helianthemum**

**Iberis**

**Lonicera**

**Nepeta**

**Papaver**

**Onion family**

**Alyssum**

**Box**

**Broom**

**Wallflower**

**Gorse**

**Geranium**

**Rock Rose**

**Candytuft**

**Honeysuckle**

**Catmint**

**Poppy**

**Rosa spinosissima**

**Sedum**

**Stachys**

**Thymus**

**Trees**

**Betula**

**Pinus mugo**

**Scotch Rose**

**Ice Plant/Stonecrop**

**Betony**

**Thyme**

**Birch**

**Mountain Pine**

\*Although many of these plants are happy in dry conditions, it is important for the ground to be prepared well and to water the plants until they are established.

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