

Outdoor Water Use

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Some homes use most of their water outdoors

Outdoor water use varies widely from one home to another. Apartment dwellers typically use little or no water for watering outdoor plants, so the contribution of outdoor water use to total water use is rather small. Homes with large lawns or extensive gardens and landscaping, on the other hand, can use a sizable portion of their total water use out of doors.

There also exist regional differences in outdoor water use. Residents of wetter parts of the country, such as the Eastern states, use less municipal water for watering outdoor plants than those in more arid regions, such as the Southwest. This occurs because rainfall in an average year in wetter states supplies most of the plant's water needs, so less supplemental watering is needed.

But even homes with extensive landscaping can take simple steps to conserve water. Let's examine these steps in the pages that follow.

Planning and preparation are keys to water-wise landscaping

As described in detail in the "WaterWise Landscaping & Watering Guide" linked on this page, it is possible to have beautiful landscaping while minimizing your outdoor water usage – an approach called *xeriscaping*. The key is proper planning. Begin by mapping your landscaping based on topography and soil and climatic characteristics. Put plants with similar watering needs together in zones that require low or moderate levels of water. Plants native to your region are a better choice than exotics, as native plants are already well-adapted to the climate in your area and will require less supplemental watering. Reduce the area planned for coverage with grass, as grasses have rather high demands for water and fertilizer.

Provide plants with soil rich in nutrients and organic matter, as healthy soils will hold water more efficiently and stimulate root growth to reach deeper water sources. Cover the soil with mulch to maintain high soil moisture levels.

Monitor rainfall amounts and soil moisture levels, so that you do not add water when the soil is already saturated. Use efficient methods of irrigation that are matched to the needs of the plants in your yard. Water plants in the morning when evaporation rate are reduced due to cooler temperatures. Avoid frequent watering at night, as this can promote the growth of harmful fungi on plants by keeping them moist for long periods. Weed frequently, as weeds compete with plants for water and nutrients. Cut your grass regularly, but keep it high to shade the soil and reduce evaporation at ground level.

In the end, with a little preparation you can have lush, vibrant landscaping while minimizing water use – and save yourself a lot of money on your water bill at the same time.



Caption: Low-demand landscaping is carefully planned to minimize supplemental watering.

Source: <https://www.diynetwork.com/how-to/outdoors/gardening/desert-xeriscape-and-rock-gardens-pictures>

HSW Box: "How Xeriscaping works" (6 pp.)

Learn how to spot and repair leaks associated with pipes in your home.

<http://www.howstuffworks.com/lawn-garden/professional-landscaping/alternative-methods/xeriscaping.htm>

One Step Beyond: "WaterWise Landscaping & Watering Guide" (24 pp.)

A concise, complete, and easy to understand guide to water-wise landscaping – from start to finish.

<https://www.dewater.com/sites/default/files/landscape%20guide.pdf>

Capture rainwater for landscape irrigation with rain barrels

Rainwater is “free water from the sky” for your landscaping, but it doesn’t always fall with the regularity needed to sustain plant growth. Since the earliest times, people have been capturing rainwater in vessels to store for use during periods when it is not raining. With our reliable supply of clean water, modern Americans largely abandoned the process in recent decades but it’s now making a comeback as water supplies tighten and stress on water systems increases.

Rain barrels typically hook up to the downspouts that collect water from a home’s roof. Water flowing down the spout enters the rain barrel and can be tapped for use at a later date using a spigot on the barrel. Many rain barrels have shutoffs switches on the downspout that redirect water away from the rain barrel once it is full, and all barrels need to tightly seal all openings to prevent mosquitoes from laying eggs in the standing water.

Some rain barrels are personalized and decorated imaginatively, while others are designed to blend in with landscaping and be largely invisible. Some highly sustainable homes bury large cisterns next to the home and funnel all downspouts to this underground “rain barrel”. The water in the cistern is then pumped out and used for watering landscaping, all at no cost to the homeowner. The linked video describes one such system in suburban Atlanta.



Caption: Rain barrels can look very different, but all store water from rain events for later use.

HSW Box: “How rain barrels work” (8 pp.)

Learn how to build, install, and use rain barrels to store rainwater for watering plants.

<http://home.howstuffworks.com/rain-barrel.htm>