

Creating a water-efficient garden

Spring is time to get back into the garden – the temperature is rising and things are bursting back into life.

Whether you're planning a big garden or some potted plants on a window sill, making smart choices when selecting your plants, and their placement and watering techniques means you can create a garden that thrives in dry weather. And, of course, a waterwise garden will have a positive effect on your water bill. Below, we've included some simple tips you can use to reduce your garden's water requirements.

Plant wisely

Many things influence your garden's water requirements, but an easy way to help reduce the amount of water needed is choice of plants. Your local garden centre can help you select the right plants for your garden, as well as advise you of the best time to plant them. For example, you should make sure to plant vegetables well before the summer heat, so they can establish a deep root system to access moisture deep down in the soil. Tomatoes and squash are especially quick at growing such roots.

If you have bare patches of lawn, spring is the time to re-seed. Consider drought-resistant lawn seed mixes that contain varieties of perennial ryegrass and fescues.



TURF PERENNIAL RYEGRASS



FESCUE



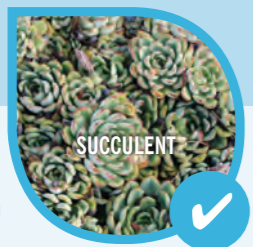
DORMANT LAWN

Be aware that some varieties of grass are actually designed to dry out and go yellow in summer – they will recover in autumn. It is also better to let your grass grow a little longer in the summer. It will stay greener than a closely-mown lawn and need less watering over dry periods as it strengthens the root system and shades the root zone.

Plants that do well in dry conditions



SALVIA



SUCCULENT



CLIVIA



LIBERTIA



ARTHROPODIUM



Make good use of rainwater

Collecting rainwater is a great way to irrigate your garden and reduce your water use at the same time. A barrel or a small tank can be installed easily – you can learn how to do this from workshops organised by environment trusts. No consent is required if you are installing a rainwater tank for outdoor water use only, provided that it meets the guidelines for size and support above ground. Tanks larger than 6,000 litres may require a resource consent. You can find out more from Auckland Council.

Watering techniques

It's a good idea to think about how you're going to water your garden. Grouping plants with similar watering needs together in one area will make watering more efficient and ensure they all receive the correct amount of water. Watering the base of a plant rather than the leaves means the water is much more likely to reach the roots, where it will be of most benefit. Water your garden in the early morning or evening to minimise the volume of water lost through evaporation. It's more water-efficient to give plants a good soaking every few days rather than a quick shower every day.



If you haven't already, consider setting up a drip irrigation system. This is a very water-efficient way to get water deep down to plants' roots.



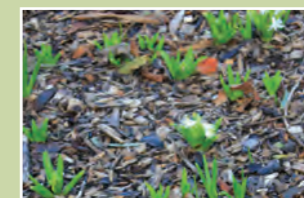
Did you know a running hose can use up to 400 litres of water per hour? Fitting a trigger nozzle or a watering wand to your hose allows you to direct the spray to where it needs to go – the base of plants – as well as to control the flow of water. You can use short, sharp bursts, turning off the flow as you move between plants to reduce the amount of water used.



Similarly, a watering can is another water-efficient way to water your garden. You can direct the flow where it is needed, and stop watering as you move around the garden.



Wheat or pea-straw, as well as bark or grass clippings can be used as mulch.



Place mulch around your plants

This will help to minimise the volume of water lost through evaporation once warmer weather begins to dry things up. A few centimetres of mulch increases water penetration, improves soil fertility and structure, reduces weed growth and protects soil against evaporation and erosion. Make sure you don't place mulch too close to your plants' stems, however, as it can cause them to rot.

How much does it cost to water my garden? Running your garden hose for an hour uses up to 400 litres and costs around...



While this cost is made up of both water and wastewater charges, we make allowances for outdoor water use.

Put simply, for every 100 litres of water that enters your property, we only charge you for 78.5 litres of wastewater. This allows 21.5 litres for activities such as washing your car, filling your kettle and watering your garden.

This applies year-round, even during the cooler months when you are unlikely to be in the garden or cooling off the kids with the hose.

Remember to check for leaks outside, too



Check your garden taps, hoses and irrigation system for drips and leaks – if your garden tap drips once every second, it can waste up to 33 litres of water per day! For more information on how to check for leaks, visit www.watercare.co.nz and search for 'leaks'.



Factors influencing the need for water in the garden

The amount of water you will need to keep your garden going through summer depends on many factors, including:

SOIL TYPE: clay soils absorb water slowly but are prone to compaction. Sandy soils do not retain water well but are easier to work.

PLANT VARIETY: some plants require a very high volume of water to stay healthy and looking good. Visit your local garden centre for more information on waterwise plants.

ORGANIC CONTENT OF THE SOIL: the more compost and organic content in the soil, the better it will be at retaining moisture and the less watering it will need.

AND... drainage, slope, shade, wind and rainfall amount and frequency.

Need help with your water use?

We provide a free, personalised water advice and audit service to households in Auckland. Contact us on (09) 442 2222 or email info@water.co.nz to sign up.