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IN THE GARDEN

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Water is one of the most important natural resources on earth. However, it is the one that is most often taken for granted.

Australia is the driest continent on earth. Yet given the way we use water, you would think there was an endless supply.

However, there is something that can be done to save water. All it takes is a little care and common sense around the home.

Hints and Techniques to Save Water in the Garden

A lawn soaks up more water per square metre than any other area of your garden.

- The wise way to keep your lawn green during the summer is to aerate the soil, feed but don't over fertilise it, and water it only twice a week to toughen the grass and encourage its roots to spread deeper.
- When mowing, don't cut the grass shorter than 2cm. If you do, the grass won't have enough leaf area to protect itself from the burning effects of the sun.
- Fit a tap timer to ensure you don't over water and choose a sprinkler that produces big drops rather than a fine mist which is easily affected by the wind.

10mm of water is enough to give your garden a good soaking.

- Put an ice cream container on you lawn and turn on the sprinkler. When the water in it is 10mm deep, your garden's had enough. Don't forget to adjust your timer accordingly.

Watering your garden during the heat of the day is wasteful because much of the water will evaporate before it even reaches the roots. In fact, watering the leaves at this time can actually damage them.

- Water your garden in the cool of the morning or late evening, when your plants can get the maximum benefit from the water you give them.

Frequent watering makes our plants shallow rooted and more dependent on you for survival.

- Water you garden less often, but more thoroughly. This encourages your plants to extend their roots deeper, making them hardier, and less thirsty.
- Installing 'microsprays' for annuals and ferns will ensure that water is efficiently controlled at a rate the soil can absorb, avoiding wasteful water runoff. You save time, you save water and your garden flourishes.
- **Clever landscaping can save up to 50% of the water you use in your garden.**
- Plant windbreaks to reduce the drying effect of the wind. Group plants with similar water needs (hydrozoning) and keep lawns to a minimum.
- Using a hose to 'sweep' your driveways and footpaths wastes more than approximately 1,000 litres per hour.
- Use your broom. Its quicker, more efficient and friendlier to the environment as you can add the rubbish to you compost heap.

- If you don't have a compost heap, start on with lawn clippings, leaves, garden rubbish and food scraps. As you keep adding to it, the 'mulch' that forms can be used to save up to 73% of the water lost by evaporation in your garden.

If you wash your car once a fortnight and leave the hose running throughout, you'd use 1,000 litres of water per hour, or 13,000 litres of water per year.

- Limit the use of your hose to a quick spray at the beginning, to loosen the dirt and grime, and at the end to rinse off the soapy water, You'll save around 400 litres per wash.
- Always wash your car on the lawn and 'water' it at the same time.

Designing your Garden to Save Water

Being water conscious begins with designing your garden to be water efficient in terms of layout, reticulation and applying the correct qualities of water where it may be required.

A water wise garden design will:

- Minimise the extent of water consuming plants;
- Maximise the use of water conserving elements and techniques;
- Apply the basic principle of hydrozoning (grouping plants of similar water needs)

Before planting your garden you will need to investigate and analyse:

- Orientation, sun and shade, and prevailing winds
- Topography and water run off
- Soil types, water holding capacity, compaction, fertility.
- Availability of water.
- Views both outward and inward
- Overall area available for the garden.

And consider your other needs such as:

- Utility space (clothes drying, compost and storage areas);
- Outdoor living spaces (BBQ's, seating, swimming pool);
- Functional and aesthetics requirements;
- Plant preference and design styles (native or exotic, formal or informal);
- Maintenance expectations; and
- Budget available

General Design Principles

- Do not plant areas unless it is necessary for functional or aesthetic reasons.
- Maximise the use of non-planting treatments such as paving and mulching.
- At the same time, beware of excessive unshaded paving which can be hot and glaring. Vary materials and arrange planting to frame and shade paved areas.
- Make use of windbreaks, pergolas, screens, lattice, shade cloth and vines to shelter the house, outdoor living areas and plants.
- Keep planted areas dense and consolidated. Sparse scattered plants are more difficult to water efficiently than ones in defined areas.
- Keep lawn to the minimum, consistent with functional and aesthetic requirements. Avoid planting lawn on slopes or in narrow necks or paths which are difficult to water efficiently and maintain.
- Choose a lawn that is tolerant of high temperatures and needs less water such as Kikuyu or Couch.

Hydrozoning

Apply the principles of hydrozoning to plant selection and arrangement:

- A broad selection of plants can be used, but keep high water demand plants to a minimum.
- Arrange plants having similar water requirements together (hydrozoning) and take this into account when deciding soil improvement and mulching, and when managing irrigation.

Further Information

The information contained in this information sheet was obtained from the following sources. These sources may be useful to gather further information regarding water conservation.

- <http://www.vicnet.net.au>

This website contains water conservation ideas – twenty ways to save water

- <http://www.watercorporation.com.au>

This website has a section titled, 'Waterwise guide to Gardens'.

- <http://www.sawater.com.au>

The SA Water website has a section identifying many ways to save water in the home and garden. Furthermore, this website provides information on the supply, reticulation and quality of South Australia's water supply. The SA Water Garden Guide is also useful source of information.