

Plants, techniques affect amount of water used in lawns, gardens

Water is a precious resource in any climate. During the growing season, your garden thrives on water, but conservation is important. Here are some tips from horticulture expert Steve Jacobs, president of Nature Designs (www.naturedesigns.net) for conserving water while keeping your lawn and garden in tip-top shape.

➤ **Control irrigation:** If you have a watering system, adjust its controller to optimize water run time and frequency to avoid watering too much or too little.

➤ **Know your soil:** Depending on your location, you may have clay, sand, silt, loam or a combination of these. Heavy soils such as clay have tiny pore spaces and take in water slowly, so water runoff is more likely. Sandy soils have large pore spaces. These allow water to penetrate quickly but don't retain water, so you may need to water more often.

➤ **Assess the terrain:** The steeper the terrain, the greater the potential for water runoff. To avoid runoff, have an irrigation system with a low precipitation rate or set it for short run times.

➤ **Add mulch:** Adding a 2-inch layer of ground-cover mulch to planter beds is a way to conserve water. It will lower the temperature of the soil and dramatically reduce evaporation. Other benefits include help with weed control and erosion control and the addition of organic matter to the soil.

➤ **Age matters:** Mature plants and trees that have fully developed root systems can be watered less frequently and in some instances only a few times a year or not at all. So, as your landscaping ages, your watering schedule should be adjusted accordingly.

➤ **Become drought-tolerant:** If your current landscape requires a lot of water, consider changing the plantings to Mediterranean and native plants. This will allow you to water less often and still have a beautiful garden.

➤ **Log on:** There are many online resources to help homeowners conserve. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers a "Backyard Conservation Tip Sheet" at www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard/watercon.html.

