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Water Wise Tips for Colorado Landscapes

These basic conservation principles will maximize Colorado's limited water supply and encourage a healthy, hardy and drought-resistant landscape.

EFFICIENT WATERING HINTS:

- ▶ **Water lawn and planting beds according to their needs.** Check soil moisture before watering. Insert a 6 inch screwdriver into the soil; if it can be easily inserted, you don't need to water.
- ▶ **Water at night.** Water at night (6 p.m. - 10 a.m.) but not during the heat of the day or when the wind is blowing. Set your sprinklers to hit the landscape only, not sidewalks, driveways, windows, etc.
- ▶ **Look for footprints.** Water when footprints or mower tracks become easily visible on the turf or when large areas of the lawn take on a bluish-gray color.
- ▶ **Has it rained?** Skip watering on days following 1/2 inch or more of rain. On cool, cloudy days plants use less water and there is less evaporation. This extends the time needed between watering.
- ▶ **Check your sprinkler system.** Check to see how long each zone is scheduled to run and adjust the timer. A shade zone will require less water than a hot, sunny area and the cooler seasons require less water than the hot summer months. Check sprinkler heads frequently to make sure that they are functioning properly. Learn how to operate your system manually.
- ▶ **Watering with a hose?** Use household timers to remind you to move or stop soaker hoses and sprinklers, and check your sprinklers to see how much water they put out. (This is easily done by placing a shallow container like a cat food or tuna fish can in the yard to measure water.) This will help determine how long you should water.

For grass . . .

- ▶ **Aerate.** Core aeration is an important part of lawn maintenance, because it relieves soil compaction and allows better water, air and fertilizer penetration. The result is less water run-off and better plant health. Aerate in the spring and fall under moderate moisture conditions for best results
- ▶ **Mow efficiently.** Set your mower at the highest levels possible and make sure the blade is sharp. Leave your lawn clippings on the turf and use a mulching mower to recycle moisture and nutrients back into the yard.
- ▶ **Brown spots?** Be willing to accept a less than perfect lawn. Respond to brown spots by hand watering. Check the coverage of the sprinklers, and look for

broken lines or heads, clogged nozzles resulting in poor spray patterns, and improperly adjusted heads/nozzles frequently.

- ▶ **Fertilize.** Consider applying iron fertilizers moderately. Reduce nitrogen application rates. Lush, fast-growing grass uses more water. Fertilize in summer with a slow-release fertilizer and in fall at the rate suggested on the product label.

For flowers . . .

Flower gardens may need less water than grass areas. Adjust your watering method to these areas.

- ▶ **Know their tolerance.** Select and plant flowers by their specific water and sunlight needs. Many low water-using flowers are available.
- ▶ **Improve the soil.** Prepare your flowerbeds by mixing in soil amendments like peat moss, compost or other organic material for maximum water efficiency and growth.
- ▶ **Newly planted flowers.** Check and water flowers daily for a short time during the first two weeks after planting to help them get established, and then gradually reduce water. To determine if the flowers need water, insert a 6 inch screwdriver into the soil; if it can be easily inserted, you don't need to water.
- ▶ **Mulch.** Apply mulch to reduce evaporation, retain moisture in the soil and control weeds.

For trees . . .

Trees obtain water best when the water soaks deep into the soil, near the feeder roots.

- ▶ **Established trees.** Roots extend out from the tree three to five times the height of the tree. Soaking the tree next to the trunk is not adequate. Normal, general landscape irrigation provides water for the established areas.
- ▶ **Newly planted trees.** Apply a 3-4 inch layer of mulch at a minimum of 2 feet wide around the trunk. Keep mulch 2 inches away from the trunk. Check moisture in the root ball weekly and water to maintain adequate moisture.

For fruits and vegetables . . .

- ▶ **Grapes, raspberries, strawberries and vegetables.** Use mulch around the plants and consider using drip irrigation as it's more efficient than overhead spraying.
- ▶ **Apples, pears, plums, peaches, cherries and other tree fruits.** Water as described above for trees.

DO YOU HAVE A NEW LANDSCAPE?

REMEMBER: establishing new plants and lawns will initially require more water. Be sure to adjust initial watering cycles to maintenance levels after the landscape is established. Mulch where possible to conserve moisture.

Still have Questions? Ask a Professional!

Find a qualified professional in your area by visiting the GreenCO web site at www.greenco.org or the Colorado State University Extension at www.ext.colostate.edu.

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