



# Eye On The Environment: Drought calls for wise water habits

By Mary Jo Mitchell  
Guest writer  
Sunday, June 8, 2008

On Wednesday, for the first time since 1991, the governor of California declared a drought, signing an executive order directing a number of actions by state government. The drought was caused by low rainfall, insufficient accumulation of snow and court-ordered reductions on water transfers.

Two "water czars" appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will focus on water conservation and coordinate other efforts, but the governor is also depending on individuals to do their part, so we can avoid more severe measures if the drought continues next year.

With summer almost here, it is now more critical that residents use a water-conservation strategy when maintaining their landscaping.

As the cost of imported water rises and water supplies tighten, residents who improve watering habits are likely to both conserve water and save money.

When and how we water and the types of plants we select for our landscape have a major effect on our water needs. About 70 percent of the water used by households goes toward watering outdoor plants, lawns and gardens. A few simple watering tips will reduce that usage significantly.

Water in the early morning, before 6 a.m. Scheduling sprinklers to run before the day warms allows water to soak into the soil and give root systems the nutrients they need to grow. Watering during the hotter part of the day means water is lost immediately through evaporation.

Give plants and lawns a deep soak a few times a week, rather than more-frequent light waterings. You will use less water and spend less time watering. Deep watering enables roots to grow farther into the soil to access water below the soil surface.

Use mulch with the proper nutrients throughout your landscape. Mulch keeps soil cool and moisture in, so watering intervals can lengthen.

Using "California-friendly" and water-wise plants in your landscape will help reduce your water bill.

When shopping for trees, shrubs and flowers, look for alternatives to water-intensive, thirsty landscaping. Your nursery and local water district can offer suggestions.

Install "smart" sprinkler controllers. Instead of setting sprinklers on timers and watering at preset intervals, smart controllers monitor weather conditions and automatically adjust watering schedules based on need.

Water in street gutters is a sign of overwatering, and smart controllers can help with that. Retrofitting an old controller to a smart one can save more than 40 gallons per day.

Some water districts offer rebates to residents who purchase smart controllers. To see if you qualify, visit <http://www.bewaterwise.com>, a Web site created by the Metropolitan Water District and its water agencies.

The Metropolitan Water District has also recently introduced the "20-Gallon Challenge," designed to motivate residents to conserve at least 20 gallons of water per day. The average resident uses 183 gallons per day and can easily save 20 gallons by simply changing when and how they irrigate landscaping around their homes.

Here are additional water-saving tips from the district:

- Install a water-efficient drip irrigation system for trees and flowers so water reaches plant roots more efficiently (water savings: up to 25 gallons per day).
- Repair leaks and broken sprinkler heads (water savings: up to 20 gallons per day, per leak).
- Adjust sprinklers to prevent runoff (water savings: up to 25 gallons per day).
- Use a broom instead of a hose to clean driveways and sidewalks (water savings: up to 18 gallons per minute).

Local water districts also have their eye on the environment and are doing their part to reduce landscape water usage. For example, the Camrosa Water District, serving more than 30,000 customers in Camarillo, Mission Oaks and the Santa Rosa Valley, is expanding its recycled water services to customers for outdoor irrigation.

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*On the Net:*

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