

# Water saving tips

The secret to a healthy summer garden has more to do with preparation, and how effectively water is used, rather than the amount. By following these tips, your plants and lawn will become strong, green, healthy and drought resistant. It will also help to conserve water!

## Watering

### Check soil moisture before watering

- If your soil is moist 10 centimetres below the surface, there is no need to water. Check this every 3-4 days in dry weather and water only if required.
- A rough way of checking this is to allocate a portion of your lawn to dig a small square, at least 10 centimetres deep, and feel to see if it is moist 10cm below the surface.
- A more reliable method is to use a soil moisture probe, Mitre 10 stock a device which penetrates 10 centimetres into the soil and displays a moisture rating, these sell for \$19.98
- To view other methods and products, please follow these links:

#### Soil methods

<http://www.envco.co.nz/catalog/soil/soil-moisture>

#### Soil Products

[http://weatherdata.co.nz/products/9/decagon\\_soil\\_moisture\\_products/](http://weatherdata.co.nz/products/9/decagon_soil_moisture_products/)

### Water when it's cool and calm

- Wind and sun can quickly steal water meant for your garden and lawn.
- Only water on calm days, in the cool of the early morning or evening (before 8am or after 6pm) so that the benefit of your watering lasts longer.
- Be sure to watch the drops on the weekly water use guidelines

## Control your hose with a trigger

- Watering by hand is the most efficient and effective way to water. Moveable sprinklers are the least effective and use up to 1500 L/hr. A trigger device lets you stop and start the water flow from your hose instantly. You can direct water where you need it and this will minimise water usage, due to runoff.

## Aim low and slow

- Water close to the ground at a rate the soil can absorb. Plants take up moisture through their feeder roots (not their leaves) and less frequent deep soakings (once or twice a week) encourage feeder roots to grow deeply in search of water; this will help your plants to survive short term drought conditions.
- If there appears to be water runoff, pause watering for a short period of time and then continue. This will allow the soil to absorb the water more effectively.
- Frequent light sprinklings of water encourage shallow roots that are more vulnerable in dry weather.

## Moveable sprinklers - 30 minutes

- Avoid using sprinklers if possible as water sprayed into the air is more likely to be blown away or evaporate. Try and use trigger sprinklers as much as possible.
- If using a sprinkler, established plants only need 30 minutes watering once or twice a week in dry weather, as long as the water can soak into the ground. Timing 30 minutes can make a difference. Timing devices can be bought from local garden stores for as little as \$27.35.
- If using a movable sprinkler please use the [recommended devices](#)

# Helping the Lawn

## Mowing

Leave 25 – 30 mm of leaf. This will provide shade to the roots and soil, slowing water loss and protecting your lawn from 'sunburn' (overexposure leading to an increase in water loss through evaporation). Leave clippings on the lawn as mulch, to help conserve soil moisture and put nutrients back into the soil.

# Helping the Garden

## Use mulch to retain moisture

Mulch can protect your soil from the drying effects of wind and sun. Grass clippings, compost, wood chips, shredded paper or straw can all make good mulch. Make sure soil is moist before mulching and leave a space of a few centimetres around trunks and stems to prevent the development of fungal diseases.

# Preparation

## Remove weeds

Weeds compete for available moisture. Remove weeds as often as possible and apply some mulch, this will help to prevent weed growth.

## Condition your soil to hold water

Wetting agents and water storing polymers dramatically improve moisture penetration and retention in soils. These treatments need only be applied once a season. Use liquid fertilisers to promote plant growth without raising salt levels in the soil.

## Free up the soil

Use a garden fork to spike the soil. This will break down any compacted zones and will allow the water to feed the roots of the plant (including grass) more directly.

## Know your plants

Perennials and vegetables need extra water in dry periods throughout the growing season. Most other plants (e.g. trees, shrubs, and climbers) need little or no extra water once they are established. There are many attractive plant varieties well suited to dry summer weather; for more advice visit your local nursery or garden centre, such as Mackie's or Mitre 10.

## Plant in groups

Group plants into high or low water users. A watering pattern can then be designed that is better for your plants and will reduce water usage.

*For more information about any of the above, contact CODC or visit gardens centres such as Mackie's or Mitre 10.*