

Water Wise Irrigation Tips

Water only when needed.

Water management is the key to conserving water in the landscape. By knowing how much water your plants need, you can apply the right amount, have healthier plants and save money.

Monitor and adjust your irrigation controller runtimes and/or the amount of time you run manual sprinklers, frequently. Monthly or even weekly, adjustments provide the greatest potential for water savings. Use the City's Turf-Time information to create efficient irrigation schedules.

Install a rain shut-off device on automatic controllers to avoid watering during or shortly after rainfall.

Sprinklers should achieve head-to-head coverage. Water from one sprinkler head should reach the sprinkler head(s) adjacent to it. This overlapping pattern will provide the most uniform coverage. Even application of water is especially important for lawns. Head-to-head coverage reduces dry patches and overly wet areas.

Separate irrigation valves are used for different situations. Plants with the same water needs should be grouped together on the same irrigation valve to make watering efficient. Mixing plants of different water needs on the same irrigation valve means some plants can receive the right amount of water while the other plants receive too much or too little water. Additionally, areas of different exposure should be isolated on separate irrigation valves so shady areas can be watered less than areas receiving full sun.

Stretch the time interval between irrigation days. Santa Rosa has clay soils, which means that after irrigating, soil oxygen levels are low and the soil will need time between irrigation events for oxygen to return into the soil. This oxygen must be available for plants to "breathe", so it is recommended to allow 1-3 days between irrigation events.

Irrigate in the early morning, pre-dawn hours, when less water is lost to wind and evaporation. If you have a manual watering system, choose the least windy period of the morning to water. Evening watering is less desirable because fungus diseases have all night to attack moist foliage.

Wait to irrigate until the first signs of wilt appear. Spots in the lawn that turn bluish-gray, footprints that show in the grass long after being made, and many leaf blades folded in half lengthwise are all signs of wilt.

Avoid runoff by matching water application rates to soil absorption ability. Irrigate for short periods of time instead of one long irrigation event so water is

able to soak in evenly. For example, apply 15 minutes of irrigation in three 5-minute applications, separated by an hour each (most irrigation controllers will allow these "multiple start times."

Water application is limited to intended areas only. Watering sidewalks, patios, and driveways wastes water (prohibited under the City's Water Waste Policy). Plus, water can damage these surfaces over time. It's also important to only water planted areas and not bare soil. Otherwise, you can encourage weed growth, erode good soil, and possibly invite water-loving pests.

Water only where it is needed. Tree roots may be several feet deep while grass roots are only several inches deep, so knowing where the roots are and watering to the correct depth is the goal of efficient watering.

Trees: Watering slowly with a drip system or sprinkler every other month may be sufficient for established trees. Check the soil with a soil probe or shovel. Water deeply when the top 4-6" of soil is dry.

Shrubs: Watering once a week is sufficient for most shrubs, some can survive on less. As with trees, check the soil moisture and water deeply when the top 2-3" of soil is dry.

Ground cover: Typically, you need to water weekly until the soil is wet 6-18" deep. Established plants may do well with watering every two weeks.