SAVING WATER IN THE GARDEN

PLAN AND DESIGN

- Divide your garden into low, moderate, and high water use areas.
- Keep plants with the same general water needs together.
    - High water use areas are lawns and other water loving plants. This zone should be kept as small as possible. Limiting the size of your lawn is probably the biggest single water-saving action you can take.
    - Moderate water use areas are the transition zones between high and low water use areas.
    - Low water use areas contain local 'native' plants and Mediterranean-type plants adapted to our environment. Irrigation is needed in the summer while new plants are getting established (the first 2 to 3 years), but once established they need little if any additional watering.
- **Whenever possible utilize runoff from driveways, patios, and downspouts to supplement tap water irrigation**.

LIMIT TURF AREAS

- Grass is a water hog.
    - A 500 sq. foot area of lawn uses 2,000 to 3,000 gallons of water per month depending on location and lawn type.
- Consider substituting lawn area with ground cover or an area of porous paving.
- Avoid lawns on slopes where water can run off before penetrating into the ground.
- Place lawns on a separate watering zone so that longer watering times takes place only on the lawn and not on plants that might actually do better with less water.

IRRIGATE EFFICIENTLY

- Water less frequently but more deeply.
    - Watering to the root depth of your plants creates a healthier and more efficient garden.
    - For lawns in clay soil, this means applying ½ inch of water to moisten the soil to a depth of 6 inches.
    - Lawns in sandy soils will require less than a half inch of water but more frequent application.
    - Shrubs must be watered even more deeply, but less frequently.
- Adjust your irrigation according to the seasons.
    - Add irrigation time during the summer and cut back during the rest of the year.
    - Lawns will require watering up to three times per week during the summer and one or two times a week during the fall and spring.
- Reduce runoff caused by long irrigation cycles.
    - Breakup the application of water into several shorter applications instead of one long application.
    - More water will move downward into the soil with two 10 minute applications in an hour than one 20 minute application.
    - This is especially important when the planting is on a slope or on clay soil.
- Use drip irrigation whenever possible.
- Drip irrigation applies water much more accurately and at a lower rate than overhead spray.
- Slow, accurate application to the plant roots prevents spraying unneeded areas such as walks and driveways.

IMPROVE YOUR SOIL

- Add organic matter to improve soil fertility and water holding capability. This is especially true for high clay and sandy soils.
- Compost and redwood soil conditioners are common soil amendments.
- When preparing beds apply a generous 3 to 4 inches of amendment over the soil and dig or till it into the top 9 to 12 inches for optimum plant growth.

MULCH

- Mulching materials include gravel, lawn clippings, ground bark, leaves, sawdust, newspaper, straw, and hay.
- Use caution and make sure the materials are free of seeds so as not to be spreading weeds into your garden.
- Don't place mulch over a plastic cover; this prevents water movement and the movement of organic materials into the soils.
- Three inches or more of mulch maintains moisture in the soil, suppresses the growth of weeds, protects an irrigation system from harmful sun rays, and gives the garden a finished look.
- Organic mulches amend the soil as they decompose.

USE WATER-THRIFTY PLANTS

- Select plants suited to our area.
    - Choose Mediterranean or California native plants that do well in a summer dry environment.
    - They include many plants to choose from that will create a colorful and lush garden well suited to our climate and soils.
- When choosing plants, keep in mind the plants mature height and width, and put plants with similar water, sun and soil needs together.

MAINTENANCE PAYS

- Routinely check your irrigation system. Look for
    - Broken sprinkler heads that are not sending water where it is desired.
    - Water that is misting indicating that the water pressure is too high.
    - Uneven water coverage due to incorrect head placement (water from each sprinkler should reach adjacent sprinkler heads).
    - Sprinkler heads too high or too low in relation to the level of the ground.
    - Mismatched sprinkler heads and nozzles preventing even spraying.
    - Spray patterns blocked by new or growing plants (if this occurs, adjust your sprinklers so they do not water walks, driveways, etc.).
- Adjust your lawn mower cut height to a higher setting to allow taller grass which encourages deeper roots and holds the moisture longer.
- Cut grass away from sprinkler heads to gain maximum coverage and a more even coverage.

Source: East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) and Water Wise Gardening Sonoma and Marin Counties, Sonoma County Water Agency.