

## Avoid Summer Water Waste

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Especially during the summer, when our region receives very little rain, it is important for residents and visitors to avoid wasting water. Our municipal water suppliers have a difficult time keeping up with demand in the summer months, when landscape and household water use sometimes triples the water used during winter months. Treating and delivering water for municipal use is expensive, and in some cases limited water rights impose a ceiling on how much a utility district can provide.

In addition, wasteful water use can harm the environment and Lake Tahoe itself. Anytime a property owner or maintenance company overwaters a landscape, the excess water either runs off the landscape, often causing erosion, or it infiltrates below the root zone, where the plants cannot use it. These problems are compounded if the excess water picks up fertilizer or pesticides from the landscape. Both of these are pollutants if they follow a storm drain to a creek or percolate down to the water table.

To avoid these adverse effects and to use water more efficiently, residents can institute a number of measures. They can conserve water indoors by installing low-flow fixtures and turning off the tap when water is not needed. Outdoors, they can examine how they irrigate and perhaps determine ways they can reduce total water use. Here are some helpful tips.

- Water turf every other day from late June to late August. In spring and fall, water every third or fourth day.
- Water landscapes during the least sunny times, and when winds are calm, such as first thing in the morning or in the evenings.
- Avoid overwatering by learning how much is actually needed. Ask your water purveyor if they perform free landscape water audits. If not, you can place cups or cans with vertical sides on your lawn to determine how much is applied on a watering day. If you are applying more than 1 ½ inches of water per week to lawns during spring or fall or more than 2 inches per week in midsummer, you are probably overwatering.
- If one area is dry, it is usually better to adjust or replace sprinkler heads than to apply more water to the whole lawn.
- Make sure irrigation water never runs off the property into a street drain or roadside ditch.
- Use mulch to hold moisture in the soil. See Page 115 in the *Home Landscaping Guide for Lake Tahoe* for recommendations.
- Use on/off/on watering. This allows the water from each short watering cycle to soak into the soil without running off. Use a very short cycle if your soil is decomposed granite (DG); otherwise, the water will percolate right past the root zone and take your fertilizer with it.
- Use drip irrigation in areas of your landscape where trees, shrubs and perennials are separated by patches of mulch. Add emitters as trees grow larger.

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# The Lake Tahoe Report

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- Limit the size of lawns. At Tahoe, lawns are best used as accent areas and as a component of defensible space within 30 feet of structures.
- Aerate lawn areas annually. Penetrating the soil allows the water to infiltrate.

If you are planning to install a new landscape, you can incorporate water efficiency into your design. As mentioned last week, you can group together plants with similar moisture requirements into hydrozones. Your lawn should be irrigated with sprinklers that are on separate valves from your drip irrigation system's valves. These in turn should be separated into areas, such as ornamental gardens that need watering every second or third day and other areas that only need irrigation once every week or two. A great way to incorporate water conservation into your landscape is to have large areas of undisturbed native vegetation. Once established and healthy, native and adapted plants will not need regular irrigation, only occasional hand-watering during extreme hot spells.

Easy-to-understand landscape design principles, plant lists, and irrigation system descriptions are available in University of Nevada Cooperative Extension's publication, the *Home Landscaping Guide for Lake Tahoe and Vicinity*. You can receive a free copy of this 160-page, fully illustrated book as part of a free Best Management Practices (BMP) site evaluation. To schedule an evaluation, in California call the Tahoe Resource Conservation District, (530) 543-1501, Ext. 6; and in Nevada call the Nevada Tahoe Conservation District, at (775) 586-7223, Ext.1.