

Help Plants Survive Watering Restrictions

Here are some tips to help your plants make it through a drought:

Make sure all plants are well mulched. Using 3 to 5 inches of mulch will help reduce soil moisture water loss. Fine-textured mulches such as pine straw, mini-nuggets or shredded hardwood mulch will conserve moisture better than coarse-textured mulches.

Some garden centers sell hydrogels, water-absorbing polymers that absorb several hundred times their weight in water and then release it slowly back to the plant. If you use hydrogels, hydrate them indoors. Don't put dry crystals into the soil, because they can pull moisture from the soil and away from the plant.

When you hydrate these materials, be careful. One teaspoon absorbs a quart of water, and one-fourth cup will absorb a 5-gallon bucket of water, so avoid adding too much to the water.

Let hydrogels absorb water overnight until the material is the consistency of Jell-O. Then spread a thin layer under mulch. On potted plants, use a dowel to punch two to three holes into the growing media about halfway down through the container. Then place the gel in the holes. This will greatly reduce the water demand of container plants.

Another product on the market is called Driwater. Unlike hydrogels that swell and shrink and last several years in the soil, Driwater (www.driwater.com) is hydrated starch granules sold in sausage-shaped tubes. Insert two to four of these sausages into plastic tubes placed in the ground next to the plant. Bacteria in the soil gradually break down the starch granules and release water to the plant for up to three months.

Your air-conditioner collects humidity in your home and pumps it outside as condensation. Find the drain line and collect the water for plants. Or extend the tubing to irrigate nearby plants. The air conditioner won't give you lots of water. But it may provide just enough to keep a few plants alive through an extended drought.

Severe wilting and foliar scorching are signs of drought stress. When a plant wilts to the point that you doubt its survival, cut the top back by one-third to one-half to reduce the leaves' demand for water. With less top to support, the root system may be able to survive. If you can get the root system through the drought, the top will prosper later.

Save milk jugs and recycle water from inside the home. (Using gray water isn't allowed in some counties. Check with your health department). Put a few pinholes and pebbles in the bottom of the jugs. The pebbles will keep them from blowing around when they're empty.

Use two to four jugs for medium-size shrubs and eight to 10 for trees. Don't bury the jugs around trees and shrubs, because the digging will damage the already-stressed root system.

When using washing-machine water, combine the rinse-cycle water with the wash-cycle water to dilute the detergent and bleaching agents. Then use the gray water right away. Bacteria in the water may cause an odor if you leave it sitting around too long.

This fall start thinking of ways to reduce the irrigated areas in your landscape. Change irrigated areas to beds of drought-tolerant ground covers or mixed beds of tough-as-nails plants like ornamental grasses, sedum, junipers, crepe myrtle, yarrow or gaura.

Source:

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