



Growing Edible Plants During Drought

Growing vegetables and other edible plants is important to many individuals, families and neighborhoods. In Colorado Springs' semi-arid climate drought conditions periodically occur.

Here's a summary of local conditions as of March 2013:

- Above average temperatures predicted
- Below average precipitation predicted
- Moderate to exceptional drought conditions expected to persist
- Lower than average snowpack in water collection areas
- Higher than average water demand in 2012
- Lower than average reservoir levels

Given these conditions, it's likely that our community may be facing mandatory outdoor watering restrictions in 2013.

When gardeners take steps to safeguard our water supply, we help ensure we have water to protect everyone's health and safety.

How can gardeners water food-producing plants during a water shortage?

Hand watering is allowed any time, but you must use a positive pressure shutoff device attached to your hose. A positive pressure shutoff device allows the water to flow when squeezed with your hand and stops the flow when released. You can use a watering can anytime.

Drip irrigation and soaker hoses are allowed anytime, but please make sure you run them for a reasonable amount of time.

During a Stage II shortage, watering with overhead sprinklers is restricted to three, two or one days per week depending on the designated level of water shortage (A, B or C).

Overhead sprinklers include in-ground sprinklers and hose-end sprinklers that throw water through the air. Vegetable gardens can be watered with overhead sprinklers only on allowed watering days.

Are there steps gardeners can take to use water wisely?

Add organic amendments to the soil.

Mixing high quality organic amendments into the soil, like compost or aged manure, helps in two ways.

First, it acts like a sponge, allowing the soil to retain more water between waterings. Second, it allows roots to grow deeper, allowing them extract water from a larger volume of soil.

Add amendments in moderation. Adding too much amendment can cause salt build up in the soil and result in poor plant growth.



Plant low.

Soil retains more moisture in low areas, so plant in the bottom of trenches or depressions. Avoid planting in the top of mounds or raised rows. By planting in low areas, you'll water less often to keep the plants moist.

Use mulch at the right time.

Mulch retains moisture in the soil by preventing evaporation from the soil surface. Straw, grass clippings, burlap and other materials can serve as great mulches in the vegetable garden. It's important to note that mulch keeps the soil cooler.

Some warm-season vegetables, like tomatoes, grow best in warm soils. Warm season vegetables may grow more slowly if mulched. Mulch these plants after they begin flowering and setting fruit.

Pay attention when watering.

Hand watering can be very therapeutic. During a drought, however, try to only water long enough to keep plants productive and healthy. Rather than watering the top of the plants, water the soil underneath leaves and don't allow water to runoff.

Conserve water in other areas of your yard and home.

In order to reduce overall household use, consider replacing older toilets, faucets, shower heads and washing machines with more efficient models.

Colorado Springs Utilities offers rebates for many WaterSense® products. Also, consider changing parts of your yard to plantings that require less water. Visit the Xeriscape Demonstration Gardens for inspiration.

Support water restrictions related to ornamental landscape plants.

Water restrictions are meant to make sure that there is enough water for the critical needs in our community like drinking, bathing, washing, etc. By following water restrictions, we help make sure we have enough water for these uses.

For more information please visit csu.org or 448-4800.