



Strategies to Sustain Your Landscape

It's worthwhile to invest some extra effort into sustaining your landscape to maximize its durability. Being proactive can help your landscape be much more resilient. Here are some things you can do to sustain it.

Water regularly through winter and spring

Watering landscape plants during the winter and early spring is critical during drought. It also ensures early spring root growth occurs to sustain plants through the summer. Water your landscape once per month until you turn on your irrigation system.

Benefits

- Prevents winterkill due to dehydration.
- Prevents mite damage to lawns.
- Promotes strong root growth to sustain plants over the summer.

Continue to water valuable trees and shrubs

Trees and shrubs are the most valuable part of the landscape and can be expensive to replace. During the growing season, water trees and shrubs regularly and thoroughly. Allow the soil to drain between waterings to allow oxygen to reach the roots. For more information about recommended watering schedules for trees and shrubs, please see our website.

Benefits

- Prevents water waste due to runoff.
- Prevents water from leaching below the root zone.

Water wisely

Remember, plants can only use the moisture in the soil around their root zone. Apply only up to 0.5 inches of water with your overhead sprinklers on one watering day. To accomplish this, put out a few cups. Run your sprinklers long enough to collect around 0.5 inches in each cup. This is enough water to fill up the soil in the root zone of most plants.

Many trees, shrubs, ornamental grasses and flowers can be healthy and attractive even if they are watered once or twice a week, or even less for xeric plants. Before giving plants extra water, look for wilting or other signs of drought stress. Spot water dry plants by hand watering, if needed.

Reduce your overall household water use

By replacing your toilet, showerhead, faucets and clothes washing machine with more conserving fixtures, you can reduce your overall household water use. This will help minimize your usage in the most expensive third water rate tier. Check out csu.org to learn more about our rebates on Water Sense products and block water rates.

Use mulch

Mulch, especially wood chips, retains moisture in the soil. Adding a 4-inch deep layer of mulch around trees, shrubs, ornamental grasses and flowers can help them better tolerate being watered less often.

Consider making long-term changes

There are many options for creating a landscape that requires less water. It's possible to create a landscape of sustainable beauty that can withstand periodic drought. Colorado Springs Utilities offers many resources to help you transition your yard, including two xeriscape demonstration gardens, a series of free landscape seminars and professional advice.

Benefits

- Reduce long-term water use.
- Create a resilient landscape that withstands periodic drought.



LAWN AND TURFGRASS

Core aerate in spring

Soil can become hydrophobic over the winter. Core aerate your lawn in March or April in order to help water move down into the soil more easily. Core aeration machines pull 2-3 inch plugs out of the soil, which leaves openings for water to soak into the soil rather than runoff the soil surface. Don't power rake your lawn.

Use slow-release fertilizer on lawns, and fertilize less often

When fertilized, many plants produce soft, succulent new growth that is sensitive to drought stress. To avoid this problem, use slow-release fertilizers and fertilize less often than you normally would. Avoid quick-release fertilizers like water soluble formulations, urea, nitrate and ammonia formulations. Instead, look for coated or manure-based fertilizers. Two to three applications (spring and fall) of 0.5-1 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn should be sufficient over the growing season. Don't fertilize in June, July or August.

Minimize traffic on lawn

Lawns that are watered less often grow more slowly. This slower growth means that lawns will not recuperate from traffic as quickly as they normally would. This can lead to bare spots. To avoid this, minimize unnecessary traffic when the lawn is stressed or dormant (brown).

Set your mower high and mow during the cool parts of the day

Set your mower at its highest setting to minimize mowing stress on lawns (3-4 inches). Mowing during early morning hours will allow the cuts on the blades of grass to begin healing before the heat of the day sets in, thereby reducing water loss.

Continue to water your lawn

If your lawn turns brown, it may be tempting to stop watering altogether. If the grass is in decent shape, consider continuing to water. Continuing to water will help the grass survive and help it recuperate more quickly when the drought is over. In addition, many trees and shrubs have roots in lawn areas. Continuing to water the lawn is an effective way to water nearby trees and shrubs.

An alternative approach is to let Kentucky bluegrass go dormant (turn brown) in the heat of the summer. This is accomplished by not watering it during the heat of the summer (July and August). It can recuperate if watered in the cooler months of spring and fall. If a lawn is in poor shape to begin with and there are no nearby trees or shrubs, it may make sense to stop watering and replace the lawn or relandscape in the future.

Tune up your sprinkler system; check it often

Lawn areas where the sprinklers are not covering evenly are more likely to develop brown spots. Invest in repairing and modifying your sprinkler system to make sure it is applying water as evenly as possible. This involves tasks like straightening, raising and repairing sprinkler heads, unclogging nozzles, fine tuning the spray pattern, making sure rotors turn properly, pruning blocking branches, etc. Check your sprinkler every week to make sure it is operating properly. Repair as needed.

Understand that brown may mean dormant, not dead

Many plants have the ability to go into a dormant state if water is not available. Rather than dying, these plants will turn brown and may drop their leaves. Kentucky bluegrass lawns, for example, can survive extended periods of being dormant. Instead of assuming the plant is dead and replacing the plant immediately, wait until moisture returns before making a decision.

Consider minimizing the use of lawn and garden chemicals

Carefully read the label of any lawn and garden chemical you are considering using before applying it during drought. Some weed killers and insecticides must be applied to well-watered plants to be effective. In addition, some chemicals can cause direct injury to desirable plants if the plant is experiencing drought stress. If weeds begin to invade your landscape, spot treat them or hand weed instead.