

Designing your garden

Up to 70% of our domestic water supply is poured and sprinkled on to our gardens during hot summer weather. This leaflet aims to give you information about how to make your garden water efficient.

When designing your garden you should consider the soil type and aspect. If your garden is exposed to full sun, subjected to high winds, or has a very free-draining soil, the likelihood of your garden suffering from drought is higher.

Plants

Choosing the right plants is important. Using plants which have a natural tolerance of dry soil is a sensible way to make sure your garden does not suffer in the summer heat.

Check plant labels provided by gardening retailers for watering advice. You will find there are plenty of suitable plants to meet your needs.

As a rule, if a plant has large fleshy leaves it will need regular watering, while plants with narrow, needle-like, grey, waxy or hairy leaves are usually drought resistant.

Planting

Watering

Give plants a good soaking before planting and another afterwards.

If the soil is dry, fill the planting hole with water, let this drain and repeat the process several times, before placing the plant in the earth. That way, you know the plant is in moist soil and will send out roots quickly.



Mulching

Mulches not only suppress weeds but they also keep the soil cool, reduce evaporation and soil compaction and can look very attractive.

The best weed suppressers are cocoa shell, finely chipped bark, plastic sheeting and grass clippings – the latter two proving the best at holding moisture in the soil.

Borders

Borders are best planted densely to provide effective ground cover. This will help to reduce weeds, which will in turn help avoid disturbing the soil when weeding which could create further water loss from the soil.

For information on planting ideas for borders visit www.crocus.co.uk

Pot plants

Put plants in large containers because these will retain moisture better than smaller pots. Ceramic or metal pots are less porous than terracotta, although lining every pot with plastic and topping them with mulch will assist in water retention.

To reduce the water needed by pot plants, use a loam-based compost, which will help your pots hold water and nutrients more efficiently, making plants less liable to wilt. Also try grouping them together. This allows plants to shade each other and, as a result, less moisture will be lost from their leaves.

If you have a choice, position your containers in a sheltered spot near the kitchen. You can then also easily use your washing up water on your plants.

Hanging baskets

Add gel crystals to the soil before planting and plants will need watering less often. Also use a fine textured compost as this will hold much more water than an open one.

It is also a good idea to sandwich a layer of polythene between the moss and liner of a hanging basket to stop the water draining straight through.



Watering

Recycling water

Plants can be watered with bath, shower, kitchen sink and washing machine water, which is collectively referred to as 'greywater'.

When using greywater there are a few simple guidelines to follow:

- Never re-use water containing strong detergents
- Avoid re-using water while a member of the household is ill
- Always allow the water to cool before re-use
- Vary where you use greywater in the garden
- Don't use greywater on edible crops
- Only water plant roots, never the leaves

For more information on greywater visit www.environment-agency.gov.uk

From the homepage, put greywater into the search engine. The results will show all the available resources.

When to water

When do plants need water? The best guide comes from digging 30cm into the soil. If it feels damp at this depth, watering is not needed, but if it feels dry, then some plants will need a drink.

Don't over water your plants. If the soil becomes waterlogged it could kill your plants.

Lawns

Consider the size of your lawn. A really good lawn can be hard work to maintain especially during the summer. Having a smaller lawn will give you the opportunity to increase your range of plants.

Consider using turf which has been specially designed to need less moisture and withstand dry conditions. One company that produces this type of turf is Sovereign Turf. For more information visit their website www.sovereignturf.co.uk

Water butts

Invest in a water butt and collect rainwater for use in a dry period. Make sure your water butt has a lid to prevent unwanted debris accumulating.

Essex & Suffolk Water offers special deals for water saving equipment. For more information visit www.esw2u.com



For more information about gardening visit the Royal Horticultural Society's website: www.rhs.org.uk

Essex & Suffolk Water, Hall Street, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0HH
For further information on water efficiency email demand.planning@eswater.co.uk
www.eswater.co.uk

As a company we do not specifically recommend any products mentioned on this fact sheet.