

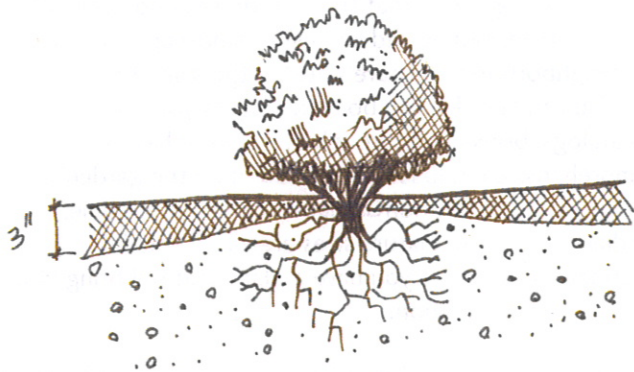
For maximum water savings, irrigate early in the morning, long enough to soak the roots and just often enough to keep your grass springy and bright green. Set your mower up to 3 inches above the ground, and aerate your lawn occasionally to help it better absorb water, air and nutrients. Except in high-traffic areas, where tall fescue works well, go easy on the fertilizer. The more you feed your grass, the more you'll need to water it.

### Use mulches

Covering the bare soil around your plants minimizes evaporation and lowers soil temperature—both major water savers. Mulching also smothers weeds, improves soil and gives landscaping a finished look. Overall, it's one of the best things you can do for your garden.

Not like amendments, which are tilled into the soil, mulches sit on top and can be organic or inorganic. Organic materials—leaves, straw, wood chips, shredded bark, grass clippings or pine needles—keep working as they decompose, enriching and aerating the soil. They break down, though, so plan on reapplying occasionally.

You may prefer inorganic materials like gravel or river rocks; more creative options include crushed bricks and tumbled recycled glass. Inorganic mulches don't enrich the soil as organics do, but they last much longer and can be colorful complements to your plants.



Mulch should be fairly thick, but in most cases a 3-inch layer is plenty. Piled too deep or heaped around stems and trunks, mulch materials could suffocate your plants. Add mulch anytime you'd like to control weeds or freshen your garden's appearance, and especially in early spring to help plants retain moisture as temperatures begin to rise.

### Irrigate efficiently

Optimal irrigation not only encourages plant growth, but

also helps protect against pests and disease. Too little water stresses plants, making them more vulnerable to problems, while too much water invites fungi and other soil borne pathogens. Overwatered plants also tend to become weak and overgrown, creating more pruning and waste disposal work for you.

### Use the right sprinkler heads

Still a popular way to irrigate, sprinkler heads can play an important role in waterwise irrigation. When used correctly, sprinklers offer optimal coverage while minimizing water waste. Choose the same type of spray heads for each zone, space them properly, and you'll find today's spray irrigation systems are more precise and efficient than ever.

### Try drip irrigation

Trickling steadily at a thrifty gallons-per-hour rate, drip systems are often the best way to water plants efficiently.

Even finely tuned spray systems lose water to evaporation and overspray. Drip emitters don't pose either of those problems, and they can be configured for large areas of groundcover, big shrubs or even trees.



### Timing is everything

To determine how much water your plants need at any given time, punch a hollow tube into the ground, pull it out and take a look at the soil trapped inside. It should be damp, but not soggy. Use this simple soil probe regularly to monitor soil moisture and root growth then change your irrigation schedule according to what you find.

### Maintain it

You'll need to establish a regular maintenance schedule to keep your landscape healthy and eliminate marathon outdoor workdays.

Enhance natural growth cycles by fertilizing occasionally and replenishing organic mulches as they decompose. Be vigilant about pest and weed control. Prune and remove dead flowers and stalks. Be sure irrigation systems are operating at top efficiency.

Regular maintenance does matter. Stay on top of garden chores, and you'll have more leisure time to take a walk, catch a movie or play a game of chess.