

How to have an attractive landscape using less water



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Education Resource**

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The hot dry conditions over the past few weeks are stressing plants in the landscape. In spite of the challenges of the summer weather, you can still have a nice landscaped yard and conserve water.

In most landscapes, turfgrasses occupy the largest area. Some types of turfgrass use less water than others. Hybrid bermudagrass is generally the most drought tolerant. Eliminating turfgrass areas can also help reduce the need for water. Convert these areas to beds of drought tolerant trees, shrubs, and groundcovers with soil covered in mulch.

During dry periods, healthy turfgrass will begin to wilt and turn brown, regaining its normal color and appearance upon receiving adequate water again. Warm season turfgrasses, such as Bermuda, Zoysia, and Centipede, require roughly 1 inch of water per week. Tall fescue may require more. When mowing, remove no more than one-third of the leaf tissue. During dry spells, raise the mowing height one-half inch. Avoid fertilizer applications with high nitrogen since this encourages excessive growth that increases the demands for water.

Use plants that are more tolerant to adverse conditions and have lower maintenance needs. Ornamental grasses, most hollies, junipers, and many herbaceous perennials tolerate hot dry conditions once established. If it is adapted to its environment, the plant has a better chance of surviving summer weather conditions. For example, junipers require full sun and well-drained soil. If planted in shade, they will deteriorate.

Mulching conserves moisture by preventing evaporative loss of water from the soil. Pine straw, pine bark mini-nuggets, and shredded hardwood mulch or chips serve as the best mulch to reduce water loss by holding in the moisture better than the large nugget pine bark. Inorganic mulches, such as lava rock, gravel, and marble, tend to absorb more heat from the sun and increase water loss from the plants. Apply 2 – 4 inches of organic mulch instead.

Yes, you can have an attractive home landscape that uses minimal water. Proper management of irrigation and using good cultural practices will help your landscape survive and thrive in the hot dry summer months.



Lantana and verbena are annual flowers that have excellent tolerance to the heat and drought. (Picture by Timothy Daly)