

## Planting Seeds of Wisdom (Water Wisdom)



### Think Wisely About Watering

Finally, when you do need to water, make sure it's efficient and effective. Following are some tips and guidelines for wise watering.

#### Sprinklers

If you have an automatic sprinkler system, be sure it's programmed correctly and adjusted for weather conditions. You can install weather or soil moisture sensors, which will "override" programming if watering isn't necessary.

Make sure you comply with PWC's ODD/EVEN schedule. And remember, water only when needed, not just because it's "your day." If you water according to water-wise recommendations (see "How Much" section chart), you probably only need to water your lawn once a week.

- To determine if your lawn needs water, step on it! If you leave a footprint (your grass doesn't spring back), then it needs watering.
- Take care that sprinklers are placed or aimed so they water lawns and gardens – not the driveway, street or walkways.

- Early morning is the most efficient time to water. When you water during the heat of the day, water evaporates quickly. If you water in the evening, the moisture can cause fungus to grow.
- Water just long enough to give a good soaking; a very light watering can evaporate before it sinks in.
- If water runs off your yard (you're on a slope or hill, for example), split your watering into two sessions, waiting about an hour in between, so water has time to soak in.

### How Much?

For efficient lawn watering, you want to be sure the water soaks down to the depth of the roots. Needs vary, depending on your soil and type of grass. In general, you should water no more than one inch a week (which will soak down to about 6-10 inches).

To determine how long to run your irrigation system, use a small container (a saucer, cup or tuna can will work) and mark a 1/2" measurement. Put the container under your irrigation system and run your system until it is filled to the 1/2" mark. Note how long the irrigation system ran and then set the system to run that long twice a week during irrigation season. Following this method, your lawn will be healthier than watering your lawn a little every day.

### Other Watering Modes

#### Drip Irrigation

Drip irrigation devices/systems – available in hardware or home and garden stores – are great for small yards, mulched areas (they won't wash your mulch away) or for watering individual plants. Drip irrigation systems are highly efficient, because the water sinks into the ground before it has a chance to evaporate or run off. They can apply 1-4 gallons of water an hour directly into the soil.

#### Hand Watering

If you're using the simple "garden hose" method, be sure to use a spray nozzle. It will spread out the water, so you're not watering faster than what can be efficiently absorbed by the ground. You can use the same measuring method described in "How Much" to determine if you've watered enough.



### Think "Field Trip"

If you want to see water-wise gardening in action, beautifully, visit PWC's "At Home in Carolina" Water Wise Garden at Cape Fear Botanical Garden.

For more information on the Botanical Garden – including location and hours – visit [www.capefearbg.org](http://www.capefearbg.org) or call (910) 486-0221.

### Harvesting Rain

Water Harvesting is capturing and storing rainfall to irrigate plants. Water harvesting will help you save money on monthly water bills and reduce your dependence on treated tap water. A well-designed system will also decrease your landscape maintenance needs and rainwater can help to improve the health of your gardens, lawns, and trees because rain is a naturally soft water.

All you need for a water harvesting system is rain and a rain barrel. Rain barrels can be purchased at various local garden shops throughout Fayetteville or PWC has produced a video with simple, easy-to-follow directions on how you can make your own rain barrel and start harvesting rain water. The video is available on line at [www.faypwc.com](http://www.faypwc.com) and is also available at the Cumberland County Libraries, the Cooperative Extension Agency and the Cape Fear Botanical Garden.

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As PWC encourages everyone to stop ... think ... and conserve water, we remind you – if you don’t stop first to think – gardens can guzzle and landscaping may lap it up. Think about this. During dry weather, watering lawns and gardens can account for up to three-quarters of your total household water use! What’s more, too much watering can actually be detrimental, as many plant problems come from over-watering, not under-watering.

With wise planning and preparation, it is possible to have beautiful landscaping that uses little water. The following steps will give you lots to think about. The more steps you can incorporate into your landscaping, the more water-wise your yard will be.



# THINK PROPER PLANNING

## **Make a Map**

If you’re landscaping your yard “from scratch” – or re-landscaping major areas or the entire yard – you may want to create a drawing of your property to identify the following factors that will influence your plans:

- Permanent features including your house, other structures, large rocks, slopes, etc., as well as any existing landscaping (including trees) you plan to keep.
- Characteristics of different areas of your property, including sun exposure. (morning, afternoon, all-day), existing shade, slopes, and wind exposure.
- Type(s) of soil on your property and drainage problems that can be addressed
- And while you’re at it, it’s a great idea to note areas where rainwater flows (such as off the roof or from gutter drains) – which will allow you to include collecting rainwater in your plans.

## **Don’t Shun the Shade**

It can be your best friend in hot, dry climate areas. There are plenty of beautiful shrubs, plants and flowers that grow well in shady areas. Use the shade you have – from trees, buildings, walls and fences. Or, create your own by planting trees or shrubs, using decorative touches such as trellises, or adding structures such as fences. Shade can cool your landscaping by up to 20 degrees. And, if you create shade near driveways, walkways, etc., it will reduce the heat that builds up when the sun pounds down on these hard surfaces.

## **So Happy Together**

Identify zones in your yard by their water needs. Factors such as shade/sun, exposure to rain and water runoff determine whether a zone requires very low, low, or moderate water use. For water-wise landscaping, reserve planting in moderate water-use zones for smaller, “high visibility” areas.

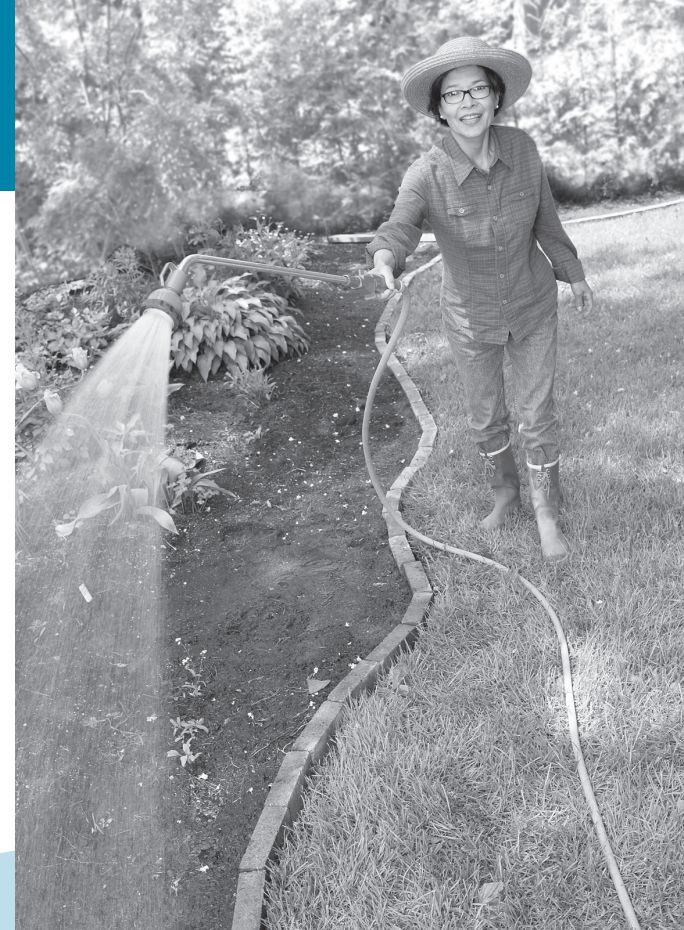
Put “like” plants together, grouping them according to their watering needs. That way, you can water just enough to keep all plants healthy – and “happy”! (You won’t be over-watering some, while under-watering others.) A great source for detailed plant suggestions (including trees, shrubs, flowers, groundcover and more) is [www.wateruseitwisely.com](http://www.wateruseitwisely.com). Click on Low Water Use Plants, and you’ll find a section on drought-tolerant plants for NC landscapes.

## **Think About Limiting Lawns**

Lawns are the most popular – and often the most expansive – part of residential landscaping. But lawns can be the most water-needy parts of the yard. You can reduce your lawn area (and beautify your yard) by adding groundcover or mulched beds, as well as areas such as patios and walkways. Be careful if you’re adding paved areas, as they might increase water runoff and cause drainage problems.

## **Drought Defying**

Be sure to choose a water-wise, warm-weather type of grass for your lawn. Drought-resistant grasses that survive and thrive (with low watering) in our region’s hot, dry climate include Centipede, Bermuda and Zoysia.



## **Don’t Mow Too Low**

Here’s something else important to remember. Don’t mow your lawn too short. Taller grass “shades” the soil so less water evaporates. And, it promotes deeper root growth for more effective water absorption. A stronger root system will also make your grass more “self-resistant” to weeds, insects and disease.

## **Think Good Dirt**

Soil preparation is a key step in making your landscaping more water wise. Good soil holds moisture better and allows plants to grow deeper roots, which means the roots can absorb water deeper down after the topsoil is dry.

# & DESIGN

Before undertaking a landscaping project, it’s worthwhile to have your soil tested at your local Cooperative Extension office. Cumberland County’s Cooperative Extension is located at 301 East Mountain Drive (phone: 910-321-6860). After testing the soil sample you provide, they can tell you what may be “missing” from your soil, and what you can do to improve it.

## **Think Mulch**

Using mulch is one of the simplest and most effective ways to conserve water. By inhibiting water evaporation, mulch helps your soil stay moist. It also looks great! As an added benefit, mulch keeps the weeds out.

Organic mulches are best because they retain moisture well, while they also add nutrients to the soil as they decompose. Good choices include pine straw, pine bark and chipped or shredded hardwood. You can also use fall leaves, but don’t use grass clippings. They decompose quickly and can turn moldy. Mulches made from “rocky” materials, such as gravel and marble chips, are not as water-wise because they heat up in sun.

