

CONTACT:

DON'T WAIT FOR THE BIG CRISIS TO ADOPT WATER CONSERVATION

With increasing demands on limited water supplies, the need to conserve water has become a major issue for many communities in Massachusetts. Water sources can become stressed due to irrigation, lawn watering and other uses. Nationally, lawn care accounts for a whopping 32 percent of outdoor water use.

Reducing the amount of water used for lawn and landscape maintenance is essential to protecting water supplies for current and future uses and for protecting natural resources. Using water more efficiently will help prevent waste, reduce the effects of drought, and help minimize run-off and leaching. While locations have different considerations, such as soil type, grass species, weather, and sun exposure, these general practices will help conserve Bay State water supplies:

Reduce lawn size. By reducing the size of your lawn, you can substantially reduce the amount of water used for landscape maintenance. Replace the lawn area with native species of trees, shrubs and groundcover. Consider alternatives to grass especially where you have steep slopes and shady areas.

Use drought resistant grass species. Mixtures of grass species are used to get the most effective and long-lasting seasonal coverage. Fine fescues have low water needs and high drought tolerance. Some cultivars of endophytic seeds tend to have a high tolerance for drought and nutrient deficiencies. Generally an insect resistant mixture of grasses that includes a high percentage of fine fescues will ensure a drought resistant lawn. Native plant species that have adapted to the environmental conditions of New England are particularly useful.

Water only when necessary. In most years, Massachusetts has enough rainfall to naturally supply the water needs of most mature lawns without the need for watering. Two simple ways to tell if your lawn needs water are color and flexibility. If you walk on your lawn and leave a footprint or the color of your lawn turns blue/green the grass is not receiving enough water. Mature lawns that go brown in the summer are in a natural period of dormancy. They will green-up when wetter, cooler weather returns.

Water in the evening or early morning. If your lawn does not have a fungi problem, it is best to water between 4:00 and 8:00 p.m., or early in the morning just prior to or after sunrise. Watering early in the morning will allow your grass to dry quickly and lose less water from evaporation. This

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will reduce susceptibility to disease by limiting moist conditions, which encourage spore germination and the spread of fungal infection.

Water slowly and deeply. Watering slowly and deeply will allow the water to be absorbed. You should water four to six inches deep, which means about one inch of water on the surface. If using a sprinkler system, place a rain gauge or shallow cans on either side of the sprinkler and measure the water that it collects. This approach will help you to determine the amount of water you are using.

Collect rainwater for landscaping needs. Use cisterns or rain barrels to capture rainwater from downspouts to use for newly planted vegetation. Use a lid, mesh fabric or add several drops of baby oil to prevent mosquitoes from breeding.

Water sloped areas carefully. When watering on sloped areas, do not apply water faster than it is being absorbed. Water regularly until you begin to see run off. Stop the watering until it is absorbed into the ground and then continue until you have watered four to six inches deep. Make sure that the irrigation system has a rain shutoff device. Locate irrigation heads at least eight inches from paved areas and watch where water is going – you don't want to water the sidewalk, street, or your neighbor's yard.

Check your equipment. Fix leaky hoses or faucets, and install a shut-off device on hoses to prevent water loss from unattended hoses. Hoses without a nozzle can spout 10 gallons or more per minute. Don't leave faucets or hoses on when they are not in use. And abide by your town's water bans – they're put in place for a reason.

Use mulch. Organic mulch lowers the temperature of the soil, which in turns reduces water evaporation. But be careful not to apply too much, as the soil requires some heat. Plastic films serve the same purpose and prevent unwanted weeds around plants.

Adopting a few of this best practices will save you money, improve your lawn and protect Massachusetts land from damage and pollution. All good reasons to try a few today.