



Russian River Watershed Association

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707)833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

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Responsible Water Management in Our Russian River Landscapes

Water! Everyone needs it. It's vital to life itself. "Water is a finite resource with no substitute and upon which there is total dependence" (Ana Palacio, June 2007). So, whenever water issues are discussed, everyone comes to the table with a personal interest and a driving need to be heard. We tend to use buzz words like efficiency and conservation when we talk about water, when what we really need to do is strive toward better stewardship of our water supply. Being good stewards of our water resources and managing those resources wisely is necessary in order to ensure the availability of water for ourselves and future generations.

Responsible water management is an ethical, social, environmental and fiscal responsibility. Water is such a global issue that its use, or misuse, can spark a wide range of emotions. From the individual peacefully gazing at a brook to the community working to secure its water rights, water stimulates and engages.

Many industries are realizing that their water requirements and the challenges posed by their operation require more tailored approaches to water management. From power companies using only recycled water for operations, to the brewing industry driving consumption down by over 30 percent, creative solutions to complex problems are being implemented.

With California's current drought conditions, the responsible management of water is playing an even more vital role than normal. In the landscape arena, there are three ways to reduce the use of water used in irrigation:

1. Reduce the site's water requirement: reduce the area covered by high/moderate water use planting and eliminate irrigated areas all together
2. Increase irrigation efficiency: minimize overspray and runoff; improve the uniformity of application; make sure precipitation rates are matched; convert shrub and tree areas to drip; and install pressure regulation.
3. Improve how you manage the applied irrigation water: Tune up your irrigation system every spring before putting it into use; check the irrigation components regularly and adjust/repair when needed; read your water meter to identify leaks and to become familiar with the right amount of water for your landscape; get comfortable with programming your irrigation controller – understand its bells and whistles, know what to do with the different programs and multiple start times.

Management is playing an increasingly vital role in landscape water use. Knowing how to reduce water use while improving landscape appearance is a great tool for landscape professionals and home gardeners to have on their belt. The key is to improve irrigation system performance and develop efficient irrigation schedules. This can best be accomplished if you:

- Know the water requirements and root depths of the plants in your landscape
- Use smart technology such as soil moisture sensors or weather-based controllers where feasible



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- Know the properties of your soil, such as the soil type and associated infiltration rate, and the soil water storage capacity

Understand the effect that weather factors play. Seasonal changes in our Mediterranean climate play an important role in the evapotranspiration (loss of water through evaporation and plant metabolism) of the plants in our landscapes. Modifying irrigation schedules to follow these seasonal variations is one of the simplest and most effective methods of water management. Many homeowners (and some professionals) limit their water management to turning off irrigation controllers during the rainy season. This does indeed save water, but leaves their landscape on a constant summer schedule throughout the dry season. Irrigation schedules should closely match the bell curve of our spring to fall weather pattern, with modest schedules through the late spring and early summer, peaking in the hottest months (July and August), then ramping rapidly down through fall until the rainy season resumes.

Our limited supply of this vital resource must be managed both for our immediate needs and for long-term sustainability. With climate change a reality, and the increasing demand for water, responsible water management helps to ensure a sustainable supply of water for both the present and the future. If we conserve today, we preserve for tomorrow...

Here are some additional resources to guide your water management plan:

Santa Rosa Turf Time irrigation scheduling recommendations based on data from weather stations located in Santa Rosa: www.srcity.org/turfetime (information is also available via a recorded phone message at (707) 543-3466).

Sonoma County Water Agency Water Use Efficiency Department's array of water conservation programs and rebates: <http://www.scwa.ca.gov/conservation/>

Sonoma Marin Saving Water Partnership: www.wateroff.org

Sonoma and Marin Counties Water Wise Gardening: <http://www.sonoma.watersavingplants.com/>

This article was authored by Randy Barron, Water Resources Technician for the City of Santa Rosa on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.