

Drought? What Drought?
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Water, in the right amount at the right time makes or breaks a garden's health. Until I began searching for an acre for my dream garden, I paid scant attention to Puget Sound's oddly variable rainfall. But, after a youth misspent indoors earning a living, I wanted outdoors to garden and I settled on 1.3 acres in Shine, 30 minutes south of Port Townsend. Then before turning the first spade-full of dirt, I searched out the facts about that essential element, H₂O. Here's what I learned that influenced my garden design decisions and vacation plans.

- Only 17- 20 inches average annual precipitation falls around Port Townsend; closer to Sequim's cactus supporting desert of 15 inches per year than Bremerton's moss growing 54 inches.
- A meager 8%, under 2 inches of that total falls from June through August, coinciding with our highest temperatures. This is drought!
- A whopping 75% saturates soils for 6 months October through March.
- More than 50% falls November through February. These are vacation months.

Obviously, summer drought must be reckoned with...every year. The following ideas can mitigate garden damage during our lovely summers.

- Apply mulch or compost in spring while soils contain moisture. This helps prevent evaporation, moderates soil temperatures, and retains moisture like a sponge while replenishing nutrients essential to plant health.
- Group plants with similar water needs together so you can water appropriate amounts.
- Make watering efficient. Consider designing your garden in zones radiating out from the source of supplemental water, usually your house. Close to the house site plants needing regular water; in the next adjacent zone, choose plants needing only occasional supplemental water; at the outside edge, farthest away from the H₂O, choose drought tolerant plants.
- Reduce the need for extra water. Create shade with trees and woody shrubs in garden designs. Curb desire for thirsty lawn.
- Realize that vegetables need regular water, so plan to hand water or install an irrigation system that accomplishes that effectively.
- Water deeply and less frequently.

A fine source for understanding our weather is, [The Weather of the Pacific Northwest](#) by Cliff Mass. More on the ideas suggested above will be explored in future jottings.

Master Gardener plant clinics are on Tuesdays from 1-4 pm at the WSU Extension Office in Port Hadlock and on Fridays from 2:30-5:30 pm at the Co-op in Port Townsend. See <http://mq.jefferson.wsu.edu/> for more Master Gardener resources.