

Garden Column 08/24/2011

By Christina Lacie

H2O Conservation & Gardening: Not Necessarily An Oxymoron.

With the hottest days of the year upon us, essential garden watering takes center stage. But with the high cost of water in our area coupled with the need to conserve natural resources, examining our water usage to decrease our hydro-footprint is imperative. There are conservation options that can be put into play now, and others to consider before the *diēs caniculārēs* (dog days) of summer return next year.

Consider these practices pronto: Use a drip irrigation system or soaker hoses instead of sprinklers. Sprinklers are inefficient and much water is lost via evaporation while drip hoses get the water to the plant's roots. If you use low phosphate or phosphate-free soaps, use the leftover 'graywater,' from baths, the kitchen sink and the rinse cycle of the washing machine to water plants. Collect the water that typically trickles down the drain when waiting for the hot water to arrive. Water plants during the predawn hours because the evaporation rate is lower and the sun will help dry wet leaves which aids in preventing black spot fungi and rust. Eliminate runoff. Watch the flow of water and adjust accordingly. Do not water on a windy day. Repair or replace leaky hoses. Mulch garden beds to improve water retention.

Potential H2O conservation ideas: Installing rain barrels to capture and utilize wasted roof water. Hydrozone plants: place plants with similar moisture needs together. Eliminate turf (a true water glutton), or reduce its size by using lawn area as an accent, not a focal point. Plant more for spring and fall blooms rather than summer blooms. Plant flowers in block sections instead of rows. Replace plants that have high water demands with hardscapes such as patios, decks, walkways or dry river beds. Use drought resistant plants: plants that are hairy or have gray or silver foliage are usually drought tolerant.

Watering is a challenging task during these dry summer days, but knowing the moisture needs of your plants and watering those that need it most is crucial to conserving water. Incorporate as many of these methods to save money and natural resources now, but begin planning for next summer for additional savings.