

How to Keep Your Garden Growing in Times of Drought

by (ARA)

Some blame it on El Nino, others on La Nina. No matter what the cause, the majority of the states in our Union are likely to experience the driest summer on record.

The National Weather Service is predicting record high temperatures and drought conditions will prevail across parts of the Midwest, the Southwest, the Mid-Atlantic and the South. With conditions so dry, it's important for everyone to practice good water management practices.

Among the things the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends we do:

- * Water plants during the coolest part of the day - early in the morning or in the late afternoon. Watering during the heat of the day can actually cause plants to burn and is also highly inefficient as up to 90 percent of the water can be lost through evaporation.

- * Water the lawn only when needed. If grass springs back after walking on it, it doesn't need watering.

- * Set sprinklers to water the lawn or garden and not the sidewalk and streets.

- * Use micro sprinklers and drip irrigation systems (which mimic rainfall) instead of hand watering in gardens and flowerbeds. They can reduce water use by 20 to 50 percent.

Drip irrigation is nothing new to Susie Thayer, an expert in landscape irrigation from Dundee, Fla. It has been the primary method of irrigation at her family's citrus groves and nursery for decades.

Realizing it would also be useful for ornamental nurseries, commercial landscapers and even home gardeners, the Thayers began manufacturing this method for other commercial growers in 1980 under the Maxijet brand. In 1991, it became available to consumers under the Mister Landscaper name.

There are currently two Mister Landscaper kits available. The Micro Sprinkler Starter Kit is for flower and vegetable gardens and areas where trees and shrubs grow. It comes with a 50 foot roll of 1/2 inch poly tubing and all the accessories needed to mist up to a 250 square feet of growing space. The Patio Watering kit

includes all the hose and accessories you need to water up to eight potted plants.

Both systems are easy to install and require little maintenance. Thayer points out that once you set up the system and connect it to your water faucet or existing irrigation system, you can cover it with mulch or leave it exposed because it is made with UV inhibited resins that last years in cold northern climates and in hot southern states.

In addition to directing water exactly where it's needed, Thayer recommends you also mulch around shrubs and garden plants. "Mulch will reduce evaporation and cut down on weeds," she says.

You can find Mister Landscaper Micro Sprinkler and Patio Watering kits at Lowe's Home Improvement stores across the country, or order online direct from the company by logging on to www.misterlandscaper.com.

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