

Water Conservation/Sustainability Information for Homeowners

Coloradans treasure spending time outdoors and in landscaped environments; it's part of our lifestyle. Landscapes benefit our physical and mental health, safety, quality of life and property values. There is also tremendous environmental benefits from plants and green spaces. Economically, the industry contributes more than \$2 billion annually to the state's economy.

While we love our outdoor spaces, it's important to recognize that Colorado's climate is getting drier. Climate change is increasing the number and intensity of dry periods in the west followed by high precipitation events. That makes it more important than ever that we all do our part to use water wisely and continue to reduce water consumption. While landscape watering uses only 3% of our state's total water supply, outdoor watering uses about 50% of residential water use during spring and summer months.

The good news is that many plants can survive and even thrive using less water. A beautiful landscape and outdoor water conservation are not mutually exclusive.

Protecting Your Investment

Most people have a good amount of money invested in their yards. Attractive landscapes increase a property's value by adding curb appeal that draws homebuyers, shoppers and other customers. Businesses with attractive and well-maintained landscapes enjoy more retail traffic, higher occupancy rates and reduced crime.

Landscaping can add as much as 15% to the resale value of a home and speed up its sale by as much as six weeks. It's an investment that enhances our quality of life and expands useable living space at home. A 5% investment in landscaping can raise the value of a home by 15% – a net 150% return on your investment. Homeowners should not depreciate the value of their homes by letting a landscape die. No water means dead grass; low water means dormant grass. Kentucky bluegrass is a drought-resistant plant. It can go dormant (i.e., turn brown) in the heat of summer and will green up in the fall.

Trees must be kept alive during dry times; it is costly to replace mature trees and they take years to reestablish. Not caring for your landscape during a drought devastates urban forests. Mature trees are virtually irreplaceable and are an important community asset. Denver has been named one of the 10 best cities in the U.S. for its urban forest, according to the American Forests. Keeping these urban forests alive and well provides communities with environmental, economic and social benefits and habitat for fish and wildlife.

[1] *The Hidden Value of Landscapes: Implications for Drought Planning*, Colorado State University.



For more information, contact:
(303) 757-5611
www.greenco.org | www.alcc.com

Water Conservation/Sustainability Information for Homeowners

Landscapes Help the Environment

Landscaping is one of the most productive assets of a home. Trees, plants and grass all have major benefits to the environment. Plants create shade, which reduces energy, produces oxygen and absorbs carbon dioxide. One tree or 2,500-square foot lawn can release enough oxygen each day to supply a family of four.

Trees in cities mitigate rising temperatures by shading hot pavement and cutting energy consumption in buildings. The front lawns of eight houses have the cooling effect of about 70 tons of air conditioning.

Green spaces cleanse our water. When water is allowed to run through landscapes, it typically exits cleaner than when it entered. This also reduces stormwater runoff, keeping additional pollutants out of groundwater. In contrast, impervious surfaces like asphalt and concrete simply move water and pollutants into the stormwater system.

There are lessons to be learned from California and Nevada's "cash for grass" buyouts. The unintended consequences of paying homeowners to remove all turf and severe watering restrictions are now being recognized. When lawn areas are no longer watered, trees and other plants die that once received water along with lawns. It is impossible to replace a 50-year-old shade tree. The loss of mature trees eliminates their shading and cooling benefits, causing air temperatures to rise significantly – exponentially increasing the use of air-conditioning. Without trees, neighborhoods lose their character.

Good Planning Saves Water

There are many stunning plants that use little water once established. Some people mistakenly think the term Xeriscape is a plant type. However, Xeriscape is not a certain plant or garden style, it's a system of important principles that all work together to conserve water in the landscape. Using this system to plan helps establish a healthier landscape more suitable to our climate and saves water. Steps include:

- Design a comprehensive landscape that accounts for water drainage, sun exposure and soil types.
- Evaluate soil and improve if necessary.
- Group plants according to water needs.
- Create practical turf areas and consider replacing some turf areas with water-efficient ground covers. Alternatives for bluegrass areas include tall fescue, buffalo grass, blue grama and wheatgrass.
- Water efficiently with a properly designed irrigation system.
- Use mulch to reduce water evaporation and weeds.
- Maintain properly.



For more information, contact:
(303) 757-5611
www.greenco.org | www.alcc.com



Water Conservation/Sustainability Information for Homeowners

Irrigation Technology Saves Money

The development of 'smart' controllers that base water on the needs of the plants and soil, and new sprinkler nozzles and equipment make landscape watering more efficient than ever. Use appropriate combinations of drip, microspray and pop-up sprays and rotors to water plant correctly. Perform annual system audits. Check with your local water utility to see what types of rebates and services they are offering for irrigation technology upgrades. Hire a professional to help with setting up and operating an irrigation system properly.

Monitoring Your Water Use

Years ago, it was often quite difficult to monitor water consumption regularly. Many water providers were billing once a month or even once every two months. Now, in many locations, it's possible to see consumption much faster, which allows for better and quicker adjustment of irrigation systems. Having landscape pros help consumers and HOAs monitor water bills and save water has made a big difference in consumption. With new irrigation technology, it's easier than ever to adjust your sprinkler clock. Learn how – and make sure you're watering according to the weather conditions.

Consumer Resources

Let the green industry help you use water wisely while keeping your plants healthy and enjoying a beautiful yard. The following resources provide great information:

GreenCO.org | Water Conservation Page

Resources, fact sheets and reports on science-based water-saving strategies.

ALCC Find a Pro | www.alcc.com/find-a-landscape-professional

Helps you find a professional landscape contractor.

Sustainable Landscape Management Colorado certificate holders | www.alcc.com/slm-certificate-holders

Identify professionals who have earned the SLM certificate.

ALCC Tip of the Week | www.alcc.com/tip-of-the-week-email

Weekly email that focuses on sustainable landscape practices and advice.

Landscape Colorado Facebook page | www.facebook.com/LandscapeinColorado

Sustainable landscape tips and trends.

Plant Select® | <https://plantselect.org> (find them on Facebook and Instagram, too)

More beauty, less water – Plant Select's goal is to create smart plant choices inspired for the Rocky Mountain Region.

***Green Industries of Colorado** is an alliance of seven trade associations representing all facets of the horticulture and landscape industries. GreenCO members are committed to water conservation and industry-wide best management practices as a way of doing business. We provide expert advice on how to select, plan for and properly care for plants and landscapes.*