



Water Conservation Tips for Community Gardens

Community gardens can be hand watered any day and any time, but you should still do your part to use water efficiently. These suggestions will build the foundation for a healthier and happier, water-conserving garden.

BUILD YOUR SOIL

Adding organic amendments will help your soil retain moisture and provide nutrition to plants.

COMPOSTING

Compost is decomposed plant material. Adding 2-3" of compost every year can greatly reduce water use and add needed nutrients to the soil.

- Choose material free of insecticides, herbicides and weed seeds.
- A great compost is the recycled debris from last year's garden, as long as it is mildew and weed free.
- Wood chips or fresh grass trimmings are not recommended, as they will deplete nitrogen from the soil. Peat moss also is not recommended, as it is a non-renewable resource.
- Garden centers also sell compost.

MANURE

Manure is animal waste.

- Add fresh manure only in the fall so that it has time to fully decompose.
- Most garden centers sell manure that can be immediately added to a vegetable garden.
- Manure may be high in salts, so add only one inch per season.

FERTILIZER

There are many different types of fertilizer, with different effects on soil and plant material. Fertilizer may be unnecessary if the garden is amended with compost and manure.

- Consider using fertilizer only as a once-a-year supplement, especially for leafy crops that require more nitrogen.
- Natural types of fertilizer include compost tea, guano, worm castings, bone meal and fish emulsion. Ask your garden center or community garden leader what they recommend.
- Do not apply fertilizer to seedlings, only juvenile and mature plants.
- Too much fertilizer can limit fruiting.

PLAN WISELY

- Focus on drought-tolerant vegetables that produce abundant crops like tomatoes, squash, peppers, chard and eggplants.
- Broccoli, cauliflower and sweet corn require a lot of space and water, so they are not ideal vegetables in this climate, especially during a drought.
- Plant your vegetables in the spring before the hot and dry days of summer arrive. They'll have time to establish a root system that will allow them to survive the hotter days.

MULCHING

One of the best ways to reduce water is to place mulch or surface covering on your garden bed. Mulches help to keep the soil cooler, add nutrients to the garden and prevent weeds.

- If applied too early, mulches may slow soil warming in the spring. Wait until plants are about 6" tall and then add 3-4" of organic materials such as newspaper, straw and dried grass clippings, as these all decompose relatively quickly.
- Avoid wood chips and fresh grass clippings as they may rob the soil of nitrogen.
- Plastic adds nothing positive to the soil, prevents water and oxygen from flowing between soil layers and is expensive.

CONTROL WEEDS

- Weeds compete with vegetables for water and can reduce your yield.

WATER WISELY

- Before watering, check the soil moisture. If the soil has dried to a depth of 3-4", the garden needs water.
- Water at night because that's when many vegetables grow. If you water while it's hot out, normally between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., most of the water will evaporate and will not benefit the plant.
- Avoid watering when it's windy.
- Watering overhead wastes water and can cause fungal diseases such as powdery mildew, especially on squash and tomatoes.
- Deep watering will train roots to grow deep into the ground and will provide better access to water. Set your hose to a low-flow-setting, water close to the base of the plant and completely saturate the soil.

TALK TO OTHER GARDENERS

Other gardeners and the community garden leader can provide a wealth of information about gardening in your area.



Questions or information

Visit AuroraWater.org or contact
Water Conservation 303.739.7195