

In nature, plants grow naturally in areas that suit their moisture, light, and nutritional requirements—with rainfall being the only source of water. On the other hand, the plants in our landscaped yards and gardens often require additional water to remain healthy and green. Nationally, the EPA estimates that roughly one-third of residential water use goes towards watering our lawns and gardens. Fortunately, there are many strategies we can employ to reduce demand and conserve water in our landscapes.

Garden Design and Layout

Plant Specifics

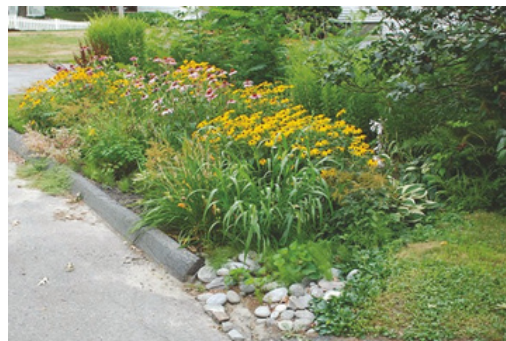
Plant selection: All plants have different water requirements. Try to choose species that require less water, are adaptable, and are tolerant of dry and drought conditions.



Know your plants: Put the “right plant in the right place” according to its water, light, and soil requirements. A plant that prefers consistent soil moisture and afternoon shade is going to require more supplemental watering to stay alive if placed in a dry, sunny location.



Use native species: Natives are well adapted to the range of climate conditions and rainfall of our region. By nature, natives are easier to care for, requiring less supplemental watering and reduced horticultural care. In addition they provide many ecological benefits.



Planting Logistics

Plant in groupings: Place plants in groupings according to their water requirements. This will reduce water waste. For example, keep drought tolerant species separate from “water hogs” so you aren’t watering them unnecessarily. This will also save you time by making watering more efficient.



The north side of a property will be cooler and moister, whereas the south side will be hotter and drier. Areas under trees can have varied characteristics. Pay attention to the different conditions around your property and place plants accordingly.



Take advantage of slope: Water flows downhill, so slopes are generally drier at the top and wetter at the bottom. Put water-needy plants towards the lower end of a slope and drought-tolerant species at the top.

Horticulture Practices

Soil Tips

Use mulch: Mulch decreases evaporation of soil moisture by insulating the soil to hold in moisture and reduce soil temperatures. Use approximately 2" of shredded bark, hardwood, leaf mulch, or wood chips. Keep mulch away from the stems of trees and shrubs and do not mulch over the tops of perennials as this encourages rot and disease.



Amend soils: Add organic matter by topdressing or lightly tilling into your garden and lawn soils. Organic matter can help improve water retention capacity of the soil. Compost is a great soil amendment for this purpose and it is also a source of nutrients for your plants.



Avoid planting or seeding during the middle of summer when soils tend to be dry and the sun is strong. Spring and fall are the best times for planting.

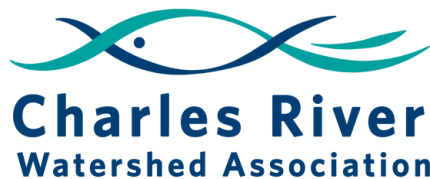


Watering Tips

The “establishment phase” (1st season after planting) is the most critical time for watering your plants. During this period plants are growing their roots and trying to adjust to their new environment. Until a robust root system is established plants should be kept from drying out.



“One inch rule”: Established plants and lawns generally need at most 1” rain per week (some plants more, some much less). If 1” rain, no supplemental watering needed. Evaluate water needs by periodically using a rain gauge or container to measure how much water a particular area has received in a given week.



This project has been financed partially with State Capital Funds from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection under a Sustainable Water Management Initiative Grant. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Department, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.