



## **WATER-WISE GARDENING**

**Did you know that during the summer, 40 percent of all household water is used outdoors?** Water may seem like a boundless natural resource, but it isn't. Drought, population growth, and pollution are threatening our water supplies, so whatever gardeners can do to reduce water consumption is important. Here are some tips for becoming a water-wise gardener and growing healthier plants in the process:

- **Add compost to your soil.** Always garden from the ground up: Increasing the organic matter in your soil improves its ability to hold water. Put an inch of finished compost on top of your planting beds every year. Use compost in containers, too; depending on your plants, up to half of the soil mix in pots and window boxes can be compost. For more information and tip sheets, call our Compost Hotline at 718-623-7290.
- **Choose the right plant for the right place.** Plan your garden before you plant it, and group plants together according to their water needs. Put those requiring the most water the closest to your water source. Consider planting a "rain garden" to take advantage of wet spots; for more information, visit [bbg.org](http://bbg.org).

Remember that plants native to the mid-Atlantic region are adapted to rainfall patterns in our area and need less irrigation. If you want drought-tolerant plants, look for these characteristics: silvery, hairy, or fuzzy leaves, succulent leaves, or leaves with a waxy coating. Plants with long taproots survive periods of drought best. However, even drought-tolerant plants need water until they are established.

- **Spread mulch around plants.** Organic mulches (such as chopped leaves, bark, straw, compost, and shredded paper) retain water and keep the soil beneath them moist and cool. They also help prevent water-guzzling weeds from popping up and competing with your plants. Depending on the type of mulch, it may also add nutrients to the soil as it decomposes. For more information, see our tip sheet "Using Mulch."
- **Water early in the morning.** The best time to water is before the day grows hot. Mornings are cool, so precious water doesn't evaporate quickly as it does in the afternoon. Evenings are also a good time to water; however, water sitting on leaves overnight leads to fungus and powdery mildew on some species. The worst time to water is midday, when plants are struggling to retain water and when evaporation is greatest.

**BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN, 1000 Washington Ave, Brooklyn, New York 11225**  
Have questions on specifics?

Give GreenBridge, the community horticulture program at BBG, a call! 718-623-7209/7250

- **Water the roots, not the leaves.** Plants respond to deep watering by growing bigger, healthier root systems, which means bigger, healthier plants. Try using a watering can instead of a hose and watering less frequently but more thoroughly. If you must use a hose, add a nozzle with a fine spray that shuts off.

The best way to get water directly to the roots is to install a drip irrigation system in your garden beds, which will cut down on evaporation loss and prevent spillage in areas that don't need water. Some simple forms of drip irrigation include soaker hoses that you lay on top of the soil and aqua cones that let you adapt soda bottles as reservoirs for individual plants.

- **Use rain barrels or a cistern to collect rainwater for irrigation.** Rainwater is the best way to irrigate your plants. In urban areas, the natural acidity of rainwater is good for soils that have become alkaline from cement-leached lime. Best of all, rainwater contains no chlorine, which is toxic to plants, and it's free! More than 25 community gardens in New York City use rainwater-harvesting systems for irrigation. For more information, see [bbg.org](http://bbg.org) or [www.waterresourcesgroup.org](http://www.waterresourcesgroup.org), or call GreenBridge, the community environmental horticulture program at BBG, at 718-623-7250.

**BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN, 1000 Washington Ave, Brooklyn, New York 11225**

Have questions on specifics?

Give GreenBridge, the community horticulture program at BBG, a call! 718-623-7209/7250