KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Waterwise Gardening”

May 4, 2021

With only 3 to 6 inches of natural precipitation during the growing season, water use for our Central Oregon landscapes is an important consideration. Each year, typical residents use over 50 percent of their total water consumption for outdoor landscape. Water-wise gardening (or xeriscaping) combines innovative conservation techniques with sound horticultural practices.

At the heart of water-wise gardening are efficient irrigation practices and grouping plants together with the same water requirements (called hydrozoning). It emphasizes proper plant selection and conserving natural resources.

There are seven steps to water-wise gardening

**Step 1: Planning and design -** Careful planning will result in a beautiful landscape. When planning, consider your landscape needs and activities. Create a list of ideas you would like to see in your landscape, including hardscaping (patios, boulders and arbors). Consider placing a birdbath or recirculating fountain to add extra water element without greatly increasing water use.Plan to take advantage of using stormwater runoff in order to maximize water use.

**Step 2: Efficient irrigation -** The next step is to plan for how to provide additional irrigation, if needed. Ensure that all irrigation stays on the intended target and does not result in overspray or runoff onto adjacent hard surfaces. Generally, automatic irrigation is more time efficient and can save water if properly designed, installed, and maintained.  Regularly inspect it for leaks. Consider smart-irrigation controllers which automatically adjust irrigation schedules based on environmental conditions.

When watering your perennials, trees, and shrubs, consider deep watering every three to four days to encourage the development of deep-roots. In Central Oregon, it is best to water in the early morning, when there is less wind and when any excess water will potentially dry off throughout the day.

**Step 3: Soil**

Our soil is typically sandy and sterile with lots of rock. Water tends to drain right through it. The general rule of thumb is to amend your native soil with one-third organic matter, such as finished compost or well-aged herbicide free manure. This will improve the condition of the soil and help with root establishment of your plants.

**Step 4: Turfgrass**Use turfgrass only where you need it, such as in high-use or play areas. Use it on large, relatively flat areas, and not in narrow paths, median strips, along foundations or on steep slopes. Turfgrass canreduce soil erosion, noise, ground surface temperatures, and glare. It also helps create a fire defensible space around your home. When properly maintained, it can reduce runoff and help increase water infiltration into the soil.

**Step 5: Plant selection**

Consider a plant’s water use and its adaptability in the landscape. Group plants that naturally grow together or those with similar water, soil, and sunlight requirements. It is best to select plants that can survive with existing or minimal supplemental resources. Consider plants that are more commonly grown in the Intermountain West instead of the Pacific Northwest and that are adaptable to the USDA Hardiness Zone 3–5.

**Step 6: Mulching**

Mulch reduces weeds, minimizes water loss from the soil, cools the soil, and prevents soil erosion. The ideal application for a mulch layer is between 2 and 4 inches on top of the soil.

**Step 7: Maintenance**

Water-wise gardens need routine, seasonal maintenance to preserve their beauty and health. In general, water-wise gardens require less maintenance than traditional landscapes, especially as the landscape matures. A healthy, maintained landscape is more resistant to drought, heat, freezing, disease and insects.

**Retrofitting your existing landscape**

If you already have a developed landscape, you can adapt it to a water-wise garden. Start by adjusting or upgrading your sprinkler system to a more efficient one. Adjust your irrigation schedule according to weather conditions. Add plants that require low amounts of water. Reduce the turfgrass areas that you do not use.

Finally, consider attending the free Water-wise Gardening Webinar offered by OSU horticulture experts as part of the **Growing Oregon Gardeners: Level Up Series**

For answers to all your gardening questions, and to register for the webinar, please visit our website: gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV’s The Point.

Resources:

To register for the live webinar (May 11 - 3pm) or view the recording: <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/events/water-wise-gardening-growing-oregon-gardeners-level-series>

OSU Publications

* [Water-wise Gardening in Central Oregon](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9136) (EM 9136)
* [Conserving Water in the Garden](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9125)(EM 9125)
* [Keys to Water-efficient Landscapes](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9134) (EM 9134)
* [Landscape Maintenance to Conserve Water](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9135)(EM 9135)
* [It Pays to Water Wisely](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9133) (EM 9133)
* [Efficient Lawn Irrigation in the Intermountain West](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1638)(EC 1638)
* [Harvesting Rainwater for Use in the Garden](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9101%20)(EM9101)

City of Bend Resources

* WaterWise Irrigation Guide: <https://www.bendoregon.gov/home/showdocument?id=32238>
* WaterWise Streetscape Guide: <https://www.bendoregon.gov/home/showdocument?id=32240>
* WaterWise Landscape Guide: <https://www.bendoregon.gov/home/showdocument?id=29569>