

Part 1-Drought Gardening Series

Preparing for the Drought:

CHECK FOR LEAKS

Make sure that your outside pipes are insulated against freezing. When water freezes it expands and pipes often burst. Even a tiny 1/8 crack could spew 250 gallons of water per day. If you witness wet spots, water running along driveways, or puddles, investigate for a leak. Check hose bibs for drips, replace washers, and routinely inspect automatic sprinklers and connections.

AMEND THE SOIL

The foundation of every garden is the soil. The ideal soil drains quickly while storing water. For drought toleration, add several inches of rich, organic compost to encourage deep root formation while trapping moisture. Make your own compost by adding kitchen scraps, egg shells, coffee grinds, tea leaves, shredded newspaper, leaves, lawn clippings, fish bones, aged manure, non-diseased weeds, and other organic matter to a bin or pile. Do not use human, dog, or cat feces. Don't disturb the lower levels of the ground to allow worms and micro-bacteria to do their jobs of aerating and feeding the earth. In a drought, double and triple digging techniques are not recommended.

WATER WELL

To stay healthy, most plants need at least one inch of moisture per week. The best way to save your plants as well as conserve water is to water deeply and infrequently. The penetration of the water encourages deeper roots that are more resistant to drought conditions. A good rule of thumb is to water until the dirt has a hint of shine. Lawns and bedding plants require a drink to a depth of 6 inches while perennials, trees, and shrubs need closer to 12. Plan to irrigate either early in the morning or evening when absorption will be maximized and evaporation minimized. Just as humans rejuvenate from a good night's rest, plants do most of their growing at night. Traditional overhead sprinklers can lose half of their effectiveness to evaporation, run-off, and over spray. Drip and soaker hoses are the best bets for deep soaking to the root zone. Soaker hoses may be covered with mulch making them invisible. When water is restricted prioritize rationing by watering:

1. Newly planted trees, shrubs, and perennials.
2. Newly seeded or repaired lawns.
3. Plants exposed on windy sites or in sandy soils.
4. Vegetables that are flowering.

MULCH

Three inches of mulch will insulate your plants from the heat, cold, and elements. Mulch keeps the ground cooler, maximizes water retention, reduces evaporation, and improves the appearance of your landscape. Mulch includes pine needles, straw, leaves, wood chips, bark, and even gravel. As it decomposes it becomes compost and enriches the soil. When that happens, it is time for a new top layer of the mulch of your choice.

WEED

Weeds steal moisture and nutrition from neighboring plants. Pull or cut down unwanted weeds.

STOP FERTILIZING

If you plan to fertilize this season do it now while the weather is still cooler and dew is apparent. Feeding while it is raining is the best prescription for plant wellness. If you fertilize without sufficient water, the roots will burn and the plants will die. Fertilizing encourages new growth and new growth will stress your already stressed specimens. As the weather warms, refrain from fertilizing again until rain is forthcoming.

These tips will get you started. Next month, I'll provide additional information on surviving and thriving during a drought. And if Mother Nature decides to extend the party, perhaps we'll still be singing in the rain.

To receive a complimentary list of drought resistant plants by email, contact Cynthia@GoddessGrdener.com.



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IT'S TIME TO PRUNE YOUR PINE TREES

With current winter drought conditions home owners need to make sure to water their trees too. Lack of water brings bugs and diseases. Proper pruning is also essential this time of year for your Pine trees. Bark Beetles can infest your tree when it is weak from lack of water or due to sap that comes from pruning in the spring and summer; these beetles are dormant during the fall and winter months. Beetles also can carry diseases from tree to tree, and the only way to stop them is to prevent them by having a healthy tree in the first place. So don't wait until it's too late have a complete inspection by a Certified Arborist at Advance Tree Service

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