



FACT SHEET

Water Conserving Tips for HOAs and Large Commercial Properties

The challenge of watering Homeowners Associations (HOAs) and other large commercial properties during a drought can be greatly reduced by using proven maintenance practices, integrating irrigation technology designed to water more efficiently and incorporating Xeriscape principles. Following are practical tips provided by landscape experts to help large properties keep landscapes healthy while using less water.

Tip #1: Determine the best water plan

In communities where mandatory water restrictions have been enacted, large properties are typically faced with two irrigation options: watering on assigned days or participating in a designated water budget program. Because many commercial properties with large landscapes need more flexibility to deliver water to all their irrigation zones, property managers may elect to use a water budget. Water budgets determine a certain number of inches per year, gallons per square foot, or percentage reduction of water use based on evapotranspiration (ET). If using a water budget, the property can normally be watered any day of the week, but is limited to a prescribed amount of water. Irrigation professionals can help develop a program that is best for the property.



A healthy and attractive property doesn't just happen – it begins with good irrigation design that delivers adequate water efficiently.

Tip #2: Perform proper irrigation maintenance

Improving irrigation system efficiency is one of the best ways to save water and money not only in a drought year, but every year. At system start-up and throughout the watering season, the system should be checked for leaks and broken heads and repaired promptly. Heads should be straight and not obstructed by tall grasses or plants.

Spray heads that mist or fog are indicators that the water pressure is too high and wasting water. Installing pressure-regulating devices will save water and help apply water directly to the plants.

Replacing mismatched nozzles and installing higher efficiency nozzles also save water. Many water providers offer rebates on high-efficiency nozzles, so be sure to check rebate qualifications online or ask your landscape contractor.

Drip irrigation is recommended for watering trees, shrubs and flower gardens. Drip irrigation systems are water efficient because they are not as susceptible to water loss due to evaporation, wind or surface runoff.



Tip #3: Incorporate water-saving technology

Smart controllers, also known as evapotranspiration (ET) controllers, measure soil type and characteristics, precipitation rates, plant water requirements, and weather to deliver only the amount of water needed. Controller types, features and costs vary, and some brands allow the entire system to be maintained remotely via the Internet. Another important and inexpensive technology is a rain sensor, which prevents the irrigation system from watering during a rainstorm. Many water utilities offer rebates on water-saving technologies.



Tip #4: Xeriscape

Xeriscape is more than a garden style or type of plant. It is a comprehensive approach to landscaping that combines seven landscaping principles to conserve water. The process includes proper design, soil prep, appropriate plant selection, water efficient irrigation, practical turf areas, mulches and appropriate maintenance. Converting all or part of an existing property to Xeriscape is another way to save water.



Tip #5: Schedule watering based on site conditions

Several factors must be considered when setting watering schedules on large properties, including soil, slope, plant types, exposures and existing irrigation technology. To adequately determine frequency and duration of watering, water application rates, soil characteristics, plant needs, weather variation and the capabilities of your irrigation technology must also be considered. For example in May, the controller might be scheduled to apply only 50 percent of the peak water budget that would be applied during the heat of July.

The amount of water applied at any one time should not exceed the infiltration rate of the soil or water will run off. Newer controllers allow for multiple start times so that the cycle- and-soak method can be utilized for better infiltration.

Tip #6: Hire a pro

Not all landscape contractors are irrigation efficiency experts. When interviewing contractors, ask for water saving data and case studies from their work on similar-sized properties. It is important to select a contractor who understands the principles of water management and also has the expertise to operate new technology. Providing the contractor the property's water bill will help him better assess how to employ water saving measures.



For more information:

Green Industries of Colorado – www.greenco.org
Industry Best Management Practices and conservation resources

Plant Select – www.plantselect.org
Water-wise plants suitable for the Rocky Mountain region

CWCB Drought Response Portal – www.coh2o.co
Drought conditions and state-wide watering restrictions

This fact sheet is part of the Green Industries of Colorado (GreenCO) education series. GreenCO is an alliance of seven trade associations representing all facets of horticulture and landscape industries. This educational material is courtesy of GreenCO and made possible through a Water Efficiency Program Grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB).