

Top Ten Tips for:

Planning and Planting for Drought

Whatever the seasons bring there is no doubt that we need to be more careful in our use of water. Here are a few tips for a good-looking garden that needs less watering.

1. Plant shrubs and perennials that enjoy dry conditions. Sun roses, cistus, are compact evergreens that need little care and delight with a spectacular display of shimmering pink or white blooms in summer. *Convolvulus cneorum* is a favourite dwarf shrub with silky silver leaves and white trumpet shaped flowers throughout the summer. It is for a patio pot and needs much less watering than many bedding plants. It flowers for longer too!
2. Think Mediterranean and aromatic: lavender, sage, thyme and rosemary all like hot dry conditions and produce aromatic foliage, great for summer barbecues. They produce their most aromatic foliage when grown on dry, poor soil and their flowers are attractive to bees, butterflies and pollinating insects.
3. Palms and cordy lines may look exotic and tender but they are tough customers that stand up to winter cold as well as summer drought. Chamaerops are the best palms for smaller gardens and are ideal in pots and striking when planted in gravel.
4. Do not waste water on the lawn, save it for flowers and vegetables. Grass does not die, it just goes dormant in dry weather. The lawn may look parched and brown but it quickly recovers when rain comes. Set your mower higher: longer grass retains its green colour for longer.

In a small space, consider gravel or stone chippings as an alternative to grass. Gravel looks attractive and is maintenance free: no mowing to do! Add interest with creeping thymes, sedums and sempervivums and dwarf bulbs for early spring colour.

6. Mulch flowerbeds and borders with a good depth of chipped bark. This retains moisture and suppresses weeds at the same time. Apply it when the soil is moist and weed free, and use enough. A depth of 5cm over the soil surface is needed for it to be effective.
7. Use loam-based compost such as John Innes in pots and containers. It holds water and nutrients more efficiently and plants are less liable to wilt. Cover the surface of the compost with gravel or decorative stone chippings. This looks good and helps to keep the compost cool and retains moisture.
8. When choosing pots and containers choose large ones. These are more efficient at holding water and do not dry out as quickly. They are also more stable and less likely to blow over. Group pots together on the patio, this helps to shade the walls of the containers, keep them cool and prevent drying out.
9. Soil conditioning reaps rewards. Add plenty of organic matter: garden compost and well-rotted farmyard manure. This increases the humus content of the soil enabling it to hold water and nutrients more effectively. This is the basis of good planting and a healthy, thriving garden.
10. Although summers may be dry, winters can still be wet. Good drainage is essential for the survival of drought tolerant plants and good root development: dig deep and add sharp grit to heavier soil before planting.