

The Extension Connection

By Megan Vig

We are pretty fortunate to have received as much rain this growing season as we have. Areas in the state have reached the D4 stage on the drought monitor, meaning they are in exceptional drought. However, we are behind in precipitation compared to last year. Approximately 4.6 inches behind (as evaluated on 8/4/2017 by NDAWN). This week I share tips on conserving water in the landscape from the NDSU Extension Lawn and Garden Report.

Mulch everything. Exposed soil can lose twice as much moisture as mulched soil. Use organic mulches (shredded bark, wood chips) around trees, shrubs and flowers. Rock mulches are less effective. Use straw/hay or plastic mulch in veggie gardens.

Prioritize your watering. New trees and shrubs have damaged root systems and are most vulnerable to drought stress; give them the first drink. Garden plants get the next drink. Lawns can go dormant; watering is optional. Mature trees rarely need irrigation.

Use xeric plants. Learn about xeriscaping (landscaping to conserve water). Once established, xeric plants can grow with minimal watering. Examples include agastache, sedum, salvia, liatris, Russian sage, prairie coneflower and catmint.

Adjust sprinklers. Adjust sprinkler heads to avoid irrigating sidewalks and driveways. If runoff is a problem (for example, on a sloped lawn), split your applications into two or more sessions to allow time for the water to soak in.

Mow tall. Tall grass plants resist drought by shading the soil and developing a deeper root system, therefore tall lawns stay green longer.

Use rain barrels. During a 1-inch rainfall, 0.6 gallons of water falls on each square foot of your roof. That's over 1,00 gallons for an average roof of 1,700 sq. ft. That's a lot of water we can use to irrigate our flowers, trees and shrubs.

Mulch clippings. Don't bag clippings. They keep the soil cooler and reduce drought stress.

Avoid overhead sprinklers. You can lose 25% or more of water to evaporation before it hits the ground. Use a watering wand, soaker hose or a drip irrigation system to minimize evaporation.

Irrigate in the morning. This reduces loss of water from evaporation. Further, avoid windy days and hot afternoons to irrigate.