

HELPING YOUR GARDEN SURVIVE DROUGHT

With the Sunshine Coast going to Stage 3 water use restrictions, we can only use hand-watering methods for our gardens. Stage 4 (which may soon follow) restricts all watering. While this is a very serious blow for gardeners, our gardens can survive the drought with care and ingenuity. Here are some suggestions compiled by members of the Sechelt Garden Club:

1. Conserve water:

Don't let water run needlessly (e.g., while you are brushing your teeth).

Reduce the volume of water used to a trickle.

When you take a shower turn the water on to get wet. Turn it off while you soap, and on again to rinse.

Don't flush every time you use the toilet: "If it's yellow, let it mellow. If it's brown, flush it down."

Let your laundry collect until you have a full load.

Remember: it is the total demand per day that helps determine these restrictions.

2. Become a water collector in your house:

Start washing dishes by hand and save the dish water.

Keep a pail in the bathroom and one in the kitchen and collect (using a strainer as necessary):

- The water you use to wash your hands.
- Old water in the kettle. Unused tea from your teapot...and so forth...
- Vegetable washing and cooking water.
- The water that goes down the drain waiting for hot water to come to the sink or tub/shower.

Plug your bathtub and collect bath/shower water. Some people use a submersible pump to disperse the bath water out to water barrels. Stay away from heavy bath oils now. Use small amounts of mild shampoo/soap. An added advantage is that the soap helps deter many types of garden pests. You will have the happiest tomatoes on the coast.

3. Taking care of your garden:

Identify the drought resistant plants in your garden. Avoid watering things that don't need it.

You may not be able to save everything, so decide which of your plants most need attention.

Water susceptible plants deeply by watering can (Stage 3) or with collected water (Stage 4) in the evening. Weed thoroughly first, then mulch to shade soil and slow evaporation. This can be any kind of compost material, straw, spoiled hay, the clippings from plants, wood chips, bark mulch, etc. Free wood chips are available from Sechelt Tree Service 604-885-6606 and Fleming Tree Experts 604-885 8733.

Create mini-reservoirs: collect plastic containers with lids, such as juice bottles. Poke holes in the bottom, half-bury next to your plant, fill with water and cap.

Keep your gardens free of weeds as they compete with plants for water.

Reduce or stop any fertilizing as fertilizer stimulates growth and therefore plants will need more water.

Trim back plants that have become leggy or floppy. They will need less water and regrow compactly.

Prop umbrellas or other sun shades to shelter tender plants from midday sun.

Pay attention to your pots. They dry out very quickly.

If plants are struggling, cut the flowers to decorate the house to reduce stress on the plant. It is a good idea to cut the flowers on hydrangeas and to cut the roses to lessen the stress on them.

When planting, amend sandy local soil with compost, composted manure, peat moss, or bagged soil to improve water holding capacity.

Pay attention to any new plantings this year, and to trees and shrubs the first 2 years. If you have

landscape fabric pull it away from the center of the plant.

Don't forget to water your fruit trees, maples and other ornamentals. This is the perfect place to dump dish water.

Now is the time to take garden notes: what does best in the heat and lack of water? What is struggling the most?

Many thanks to Sharon O'Brien, Bill Terry, Ruth Rodgers, Christi Blackman, Laurie Creak, Dan Fivehouse and Gwen Steele of the Okanagan Xeriscape Association.

GUIDELINES FOR THE CULTURE OF DROUGHT-TOLERANT PLANTS:

SOIL - Well-drained, loose soil is essential to the survival of drought tolerant plants. The loose soil structure allows their roots to grow deep down where the moisture is held. Many of these plants also benefit from the addition of organic matter to the soil, which helps add nutrients and hold moisture. If your soil is heavy, add small pebbles or coarse sand to improve drainage.

WATER - Even the most drought tolerant perennials require supplemental water until they are established. The smaller the root system, the more water they'll need, but the general rule is one inch of water per week (including rain). Less frequent but deep watering is better for plants than more frequent but light watering because it encourages them to send their roots down deeper into the soil. As the plants begin to grow and thrive on their own, gradually decrease the amount of supplemental water.

MULCH - Mulch your drought tolerant perennials with about two inches of organic material such as shredded bark or leaves. Do not use stone as a mulch--it holds heat and reflects light which can damage the plants.

FERTILIZER - Use fertilizer sparingly on drought tolerant plants. If they begin to show signs of decline or discoloration, then it's time to fertilize.

DIVISION - Most drought tolerant perennials will perform admirably for years without being divided. Exceptions include the most vigorous or prolific perennials such as daylilies, hostas, and tall bearded irises.

[www.perennialresource.com]

DROUGHT TOLERANT PLANTS:

- Achillea (Yarrow)
- Aegopodium (Snow-on-the-Mountain)
- Agastache (Anise Hyssop)
- Ajuga (Bugleweed)
- Alcea (Hollyhocks)
- Alchemilla (Lady's Mantle)
- Anthemis (Golden Marguerite)
- Arabis (Rock Cress)
- Arenaria (Mountain Sandwort)
- Armeria (Common Thrift, Sea Pinks)
- Artemisia (Wormwood, Silver Mound Artemesia)
- Asclepias tuberosa (Butterfly Weed)
- Astilbe chinensis (Chinese Astilbe)
- Aurinia (Basket-of-Gold, Perennial Alyssum)
- Baptisia (False Indigo)
- Belamcanda (Blackberry Lily)
- Buddleia (Butterfly Bush)
- Calamagrostis (Feather Reed Grass)
- Calamintha (Calamint)
- Caryopteris (Blue Mist Shrub)
- Centaurea (Perennial Bachelor's Button)
- Centranthus (Red Valerian, Jupiter's Beard)
- Cerastium (Snow in Summer)
- Coreopsis (Tickseed)
- Cortaderia (Pampas Grass)
- Delosperma (Ice Plant)
- Dianthus (Pinks)
- Digitalis (Foxglove)
- Echinacea (Coneflower)
- Echinops (Globe Thistle)
- Erianthus (Ravenna Grass)
- Euonymous (Purple Leaf Wintercreeper)
- Euphorbia (Cushion Spurge)
- Festuca (Blue Fescue)
- Gaillardia (Blanket Flower)
- Geranium sanguineum (Hardy Geranium, Cranesbill)
- Gypsophila (Baby's Breath)
- Hedera (English Ivy)
- Helictotrichon (Blue Oat Grass)
- Helleborus (Lenten Rose)
- Hemerocallis (Daylily)
- Heuchera (Coral Bells)
- Hosta
- Iberis (Candytuft)
- Incarvillea (Hardy Gloxinia)
- Iris-Tall Bearded
- Kniphofia (Red Hot Poker)
- Lavandula (Lavender)
- Liatris (Gayfeather, Blazing Star)
- Linum (Flax)
- Liriope (Lily-turf)
- Malva (Hollyhock Mallow)
- Miscanthus (Maiden Grass)
- Nepeta (Catmint)
- Oenothera (Sundrops, Evening Primrose)
- Pachysandra (Japanese Spurge)
- Paeonia (Peony)
- Panicum (Switch Grass)
- Papaver (Poppy)
- Pardancanda (Candy Lily)
- Pennisetum (Fountain Grass)
- Penstemon (Beardtongue)
- Perovskia (Russian Sage)
- Phlox subulata (Creeping Phlox)
- Pulmonaria (Lungwort, Bethlehem Sage)
- Rudbeckia (Black-Eyed Susan)
- Salvia (Perennial Salvia)
- Saponaria (Rock Soapwort)
- Schizachyrium (Little Bluestem)
- Sedum (Stonecrop)
- Sempervivum (Hen & Chicks)
- Stachys (Lamb's Ear)
- Stokesia (Stokes' Aster)
- Tanacetum (Painted Daisy)
- Thymus (Creeping Thyme)
- Verbascum (Mullein)
- Vinca (Myrtle, Periwinkle)
- Yucca (Adam's Needle)