

Water is a valuable resource

Benjamin Franklin once said “When the well is dry, we know the worth of the water.” Unlike other resources, many people tend to undervalue the nonrenewable resource we call water.

Oklahomans typically use about 30 percent to 40 percent of their household water on landscaping needs. This is why it’s important to water wisely and use plants and vegetation that make the most of that valuable resource.

To begin with, a healthy landscape starts with healthy soil. Homeowners should collect a soil sample to ensure the area has the desired pH and available nutrients for proper plant growth. If the soil isn’t good, the plants won’t thrive, no matter how much water you put on them.

Adding organic matter is beneficial for all soil types. For clay soils, it helps decrease compaction and increase drainage. Sandy soils benefit from increased aggregation and higher nutrient holding capacity. Organic matter also is rich with nutrients that are important for plant growth. Organic matter can be added directly to the soil, or as compost, which basically is decomposed organic matter.

Another way to make the most of your available water is to incorporate a rainwater harvesting system into your landscape. During the summers of 2011 and 2012, this may not have done a lot of good due to the extreme drought conditions, but summer 2013 and this summer have been a bit more generous, by Oklahoma standards, with the amount of rainfall. A harvesting system doesn’t have to be anything fancy or expensive. A simple plastic trashcan under a gutter to catch the rain will work just fine.

When creating a water-efficient landscape, there are several elements gardeners need to consider. Before you even start thinking about what plants you want to use, think about the areas of the landscape itself. Keep in mind the location of the home, sun orientation, existing vegetation, sun exposure, areas that collect water or dry out quickly and hotspots, such as areas along south-facing walls or near air conditioning units.

When planting plants, separate them into water-use zones to ensure plants receive only the amount of water they require. If you mix high- and low-water plants, you’ll continually over water and under water the plants. Be mindful of plant size, too. Taller plants go toward the back of the beds and layer down in height to the front of the beds. Keep in mind Oklahoma supports hardiness zones 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b and 8a, depending on location within the state.

If you have an irrigation system, make sure the sprinkler heads are working properly and are pointed at the turf or flower beds. It’s wasteful when the water lands on your sidewalks or driveway.

Another thought to keep in mind is the benefit of mulch. Not only does it help conserve water, but also it’s a great compliment to your plant materials.

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