

Thrifty Gardeners Live Lightly on the Land **by UCCE Master Gardener** **Vera Strader**

These days we're all looking for ways to stretch our dollars. Thrifty gardeners also reduce energy consumption and pollution.

MAKE EVERY DROP COUNT. Water is precious and expensive. In California, **moving water from its source to where it's needed requires the largest energy expenditure in the state!** The energy involved in pumping and distributing water can also be a significant source of atmospheric carbon dioxide. The less water we lavish on our gardens and lawns the better for all.

If your water is supplied by a public utility, check your bills to determine increased landscaping costs during the summer months. Tuolumne Utilities District, for example, charges an additional fee for each 100 cubic feet (748 gallons) of water used.

Reduce garden water by

- mulching generously with homemade compost, wood chips, pine needles, or stones.
- Use drip water and plant more natives as they tend to be drought tolerant.

The biggest outdoor water-waster is typically the lawn. A traditional Kentucky bluegrass lawn slurps up an inch or more twice a week during the summer; fescue grasses require somewhat less.

- Consider downsizing your turf and/or switching to a different kind of grass. **A new turf option, Buffalograss**, requires only one to two inches every few weeks! You can see different kinds of Buffalograss growing at the Master Gardener Demonstration Garden at 251 South Barretta St. in Sonora; read more at www.toddvalleyfarms.com
- Water all grasses only when dry and be sure water penetrates six or eight inches into the soil. This promotes a deeper, more heat and drought resistant root system.

DON'T BUY UNNECESSARY AND RISKY CHEMICALS. There are pesticide or fertilizer "solutions" to virtually any garden problem. However, many of these concoctions are costly, unnecessary, and potentially harmful to soil, water, and wildlife.

During breakdown, **fertilizers release nitrous oxide with its great global warming potential.** The **manufacture of nitrogen fertilizers** and chemical pesticides is also **highly energy demanding** and a **big contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.**

- Compost equals free slow-release fertilizer plus weed control, drastically decreasing the need for chemical fertilizers and herbicides. Compost can reduce air pollution, fertilizer runoff into our streams, and improve soil quality.

By foregoing most insecticides and inviting insects to our yards, we obtain a potpourri of free services:

- A healthy insect population helps eliminate the need for chemical insecticides. Birds and amphibians also contribute to this natural balance. For help managing insect problems, visit www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.homegarden.html
- Insects are irreplaceable pollinators. Bees facilitate pollination of many billions of dollars of crops. Native insects (excluding the declining honeybee) are alone credited with contributing \$57 billion to the U.S. economy each year. More pollinators mean better crops, lower food prices, and bigger yields from home gardens.
- Insects contribute billions more in environmental clean up services ranging from dung burial on rangeland to breakdown of yard waste into compost.

SPEND TIME NOT MONEY. Frugal gardeners often grow plants from seeds and cuttings.

- Share plants with friends and they in turn will share with you.
- Grow an orchard or vegetable garden, even if only a tub or two on the patio.

Limit expensive, polluting fossil fuels. For example,

- use a people-powered lawn mower rather than a riding mower,
- a rake rather than a leaf blower,
- a spade rather than power tiller.
- allow autumn leaves to remain on the ground to form nutritious and water-saving humus.

Reuse and recycle landscaping materials.

- Broken concrete from your old patio can be turned into rain permeable pathways and terraces;
- lumber from an old deck repurposed into fencing and bird houses.

Visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at

<http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conservation/greenscapes/index.htm> for innumerable greenscaping ideas including landscape materials calculators for both homeowners and landscape professionals.

Contact Tuolumne County Master Gardeners at 209-533-5696 for further help with environmentally sustainable and frugal gardening.

Vera Strader gardens frugally with drip water, liberal mulching, and by welcoming most insects into her yard.