



Spencer Horticultural Solutions

Homegrown Horticulture

TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

Water Saving Tips

Some years, we wish that we could just turn off the sky-tap and stop the incessant rains that come. But, for the most part, on the Canadian Prairies, we are wishing it would rain more often than we aren't. But it varies from year to year.

Most vegetables need a regular supply of water to keep them healthy and growing actively, and to allow them to take up the nutrients that they need. They are also heavily weighted in the percentage water department and can't really go too much without. Annual ornamentals are similar, in that they are usually geared to having a regular supply of water to keep them actively growing and blooming.

Perennial plants, on the other hand, can usually handle a bit of water now and again, as they have deeper root systems that can find the water they want/need. Also, once they are established, they are resilient.

All that being said, are there ways that you can cut down on the amount of water that you are using in your yard? The short answer is, of course, YES!

One way to save water is to increase the efficiency of how you are applying water. In an efficiency battle, drip or trickle irrigation will always beat any sort of sprinkler system, hands down. So, if you can put the water on the surface at the base of the plant, go for it. For my raised garden beds, I built a simple drip system that I can connect to a garden hose with a quick click. It works great to wet the entire area deeply with a 3-4 hour run of water. There is no splashing and the amount of water that is wasted through evaporation is much lower. For my new perennial/shrub/tree beds, I ran a drip system as well, but used different sized emitters in different spots, so that bigger stuff gets more water. This system works well for where you have plants in certain spots, or where you need to water in some areas, but not others.

For the beds that need to be wet down completely, it made more sense for me to hand water, so I focus on watering at a time when it'll percolate in before it can evaporate. So, I tend to try and water in the early mornings, so that it is cooler, and the plants can get a good drink before the heat sets in. I do the same thing for if/when I water my lawn (it was newly planted a year ago, so I watered more than I normally would have). I try and water deeply and less frequently, rather than short, shallow bursts.

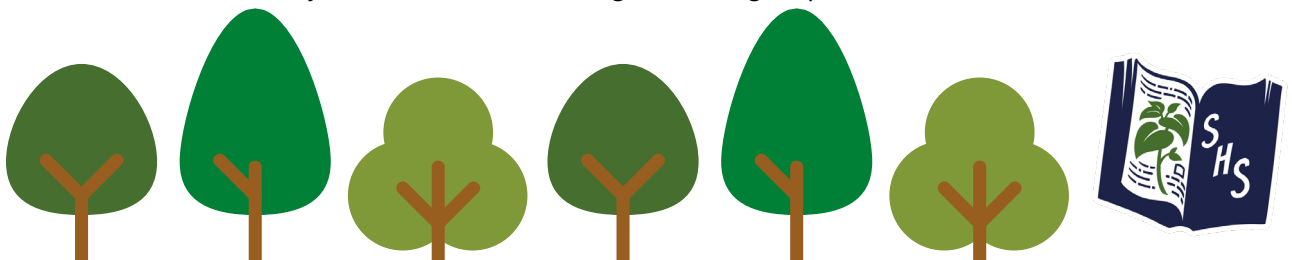
I also like to use an organic mulch, like bark mulch or something like that. This really cuts down on the watering requirements in the perennial and ornamental beds, as the soil is cooler, the evaporation is much less, and the moisture is trapped nicely. It works well. The added bonus is that you get some help with weed management at the same time.

If you don't want to install a drip system, but want to water individual plants, you can pick up neat little tools that go on pop bottles that you can spike into the soil near a plant to slowly water. There are plenty of DIY videos out there that will show you how to make stuff like that.

I picked up a spike watering tool a few years ago that I like to use to water my big trees occasionally. It hooks up to a hose and slips into the ground a foot or two deep and waters the roots. I run it for a bit out under the drip line of the trees. I don't do it all the time, but I figure that it beats watering the grass when I'm trying to water the trees.

You can also conserve water by slowing its runoff or loss from places that aren't going to use it. Set up rain barrels (with bug screens) to catch water (don't forget to empty them regularly and before they become 300L popsicles in winter). Use something like a rain chain to slow down the flow of rain from the roof edge to a bed below.

When it comes to water conservation, it just comes down to slowing or reducing evaporation from the surface of the soil.



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