

## Smart Irrigation 2021

I was late setting up my drip irrigation system this year. Last year, during fits of enthusiastic pruning, I had cut through some of the lines and knew that a system make-over was due. Rehabbing an entire drip system gives one ample time to meditate on the state of water in our world, especially in the West.

You've seen the headlines and the media coverage. The U.S. Drought Monitor map released June 10, 2021 (<https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>) shows much of the Great Plains as "abnormally dry" to being in "exceptional drought." Most of California, Nevada and the Four Corners states range from extreme to exceptional drought. Lake Mead, behind Hoover Dam on the Colorado River, has fallen to its lowest level since it filled in 1937! It will continue to drop during this upcoming hot summer which may necessitate reduced water supplies for Nevada, Arizona and Mexico in 2022.

Locally, the watersheds upon which our water suppliers rely reset themselves each year and are entirely dependent on snowpack developing in the winter to supply water in the summer. If you look up your local water agency's website, you will almost certainly find links offering information about water efficiency and wise use. Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD) provides water use efficiency legislation information and an introduction to the Landowner Resiliency Program with a toolkit including climate appropriate landscaping <https://tudwater.com/conservation/>

In California, with its dry summers, water conservation is a lifestyle. We are approaching July – Smart Irrigation Month – when the evaporation rate is highest in the foothills and the month when our plants typically use the most water. The Irrigation Association uses the phrase "saved water is money in the bank" to draw attention to the need to water our landscapes and gardens, our golf courses and shopping center plantings more efficiently.

Celebrate "Smart Irrigation Month" by using some of the watering tips from the University of California Integrated Pest Management program, <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/TOOLS/TURF/>

- Reduce your landscape's need for water. Choose water-efficient plants and garden designs. [http://www.watertoolkit.org/?page\\_id=1904](http://www.watertoolkit.org/?page_id=1904)
- Avoid planting turf species that require frequent watering, such as bluegrass or ryegrass. Try one of the new strains of buffalo grass that can be watered as little as twice a month.
- Water only when your lawn needs water. Deeper, less frequent watering is best for most lawns. Water only two or three times per week.
- **Urban Drool is Not Cool.** Watch your sprinklers to be sure they're not producing run-off. Adjust the direction of sprinkler heads; replace broken heads and leaking valves.
- Cut back on fertilizer. Are you growing a grass "crop"? Or do you simply want a reasonably healthy lawn to provide some cooling play space? The more you fertilize, the more water your plants require to maintain that excess growth. Many non-flowering trees and shrubs never require fertilizer. Slow growth can be a benefit.
- And speaking of trees, never wet the trunk of a tree when irrigating. Water deeply around the dripline. Most established trees and shrubs only need once-a-month watering.

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- Water early in the morning before sunlight increases evaporation and before breezes blow your precious water away.
- Mulch, mulch, mulch, mulch! A layer of mulch on the ground reduces evaporation, conserves water, stabilizes soil temperature and crowds out weeds.
- Plant thickly. There's a reason Native Americans planted the three sisters of corn, beans and squash. Those large squash leaves shade the soil, conserving precious water and reducing evaporation.
- Improve watering efficiency and distribution by using drip irrigation and soaker hoses to take water only where it's needed.

One of the things this long year of COVID caution taught us is that we're all in this together. What one person does impacts many others. Let's use that spirit of togetherness to all work toward using less water.

*Rebecca Miller-Cripps is a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Tuolumne County.*

*UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: [http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardeners/](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/) You can also find us on Facebook.*