

Drought and your Garden – Fruit and Vegetables

Water conservation for the entire household, inside and out, is always good practice; it saves money and one of the planet's most precious natural resources. Water conservation is even more important in years with little rainfall. California is possibly facing its driest year on record. Water restrictions may be coming.

Most vegetable crops require one inch or more of water each week during the growing season – this equals $\frac{3}{4}$ of a gallon of water per plant. The challenge for home gardeners is to learn to be as water efficient as possible.

Here are some tips.

Care for your most valuable plantings first. This usually means fruit trees, perennials and shrubs. Water your trees deeply but infrequently. Push a rod into the ground near a tree. The rod will go into the soil 2-3 feet if it is adequately irrigated. If it is less than 2 feet then the tree needs water.

Water when needed. Check the soil moisture with your finger or moisture meter. Irrigate when it is dry 2 – 4 inches deep. We tend to over fertilize, so fertilize less. Control the weeds as they compete with edibles for water. Remember to mulch around your fruit and vegetables. Mulch 3-4 inches deep. This will reduce your water needs by 50%. Mulch reduces evaporation, moderates soil temperature and suppresses weeds.

Repair leaks in your irrigation system. One leak can waste gallons of water. Irrigate in the deeply and less frequently and in the morning. It's best to use a timer when irrigating.