

# Simple habits lead to large (water) savings



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Wyoming is a dry state. Water is often expensive, in short supply, and difficult to acquire. High winds, low relative humidity, and warm summer temperatures can make growing a healthy landscape a challenge.

Selecting the right plants for your landscape is important, but there are other ways to reduce water usage as well.

The following tips and tricks can help reduce the amount of water your landscape needs during the hottest parts of the growing season. They can also help you set priorities for landscape water use.

## **Add organic matter**

Adding organic matter is essential to developing and maintaining healthy soils. Organic matter consists of fully composted

plants, manure, or a combination of both. Many plants, especially annuals and vegetables, benefit from soils with an adequate supply of organic matter.

Organic matter not only helps keep plants and the living organisms in the soil healthy, but also increases the soil's water holding capacity. Think of your soil as a water bottle for plants. Put simply, adding organic matter increases the size of that water bottle.

It takes years of adding organic matter to make a significant change in the water holding capacity of a soil—but it's worth the effort in the long run. With a larger "water bottle" available in the soil, your plants will require less watering.

## **Make the most of mulch**

Mulch reduces the amount of water required to hydrate your landscape. It acts as a barrier to prevent water from evaporating from the soil and can help cool areas around plants.

Various types of mulch, including natural wood fibers, plastic mulch, or small rocks, can be used to reduce water loss.

Mulch reduces competition from unwanted plants (such as weeds) that also use precious water. Over time, mulch made of natural materials breaks down and adds organic matter to the soil, increasing soil health and water holding capacity.

The bottom line? Make sure mulch is in your landscape.

Visit [bit.ly/BB-tree-mulch](https://bit.ly/BB-tree-mulch) to learn more about the benefits and proper application of mulch.

## Use automatic timers

Providing water to plants at the right time of the day is critical. Most plants in Wyoming grow actively at times of the day when temperatures are cooler, such as in the morning. Knowing when plants will be using water can help make decisions for watering during critical times.

For example, a portion of the water applied during the middle of the day will likely evaporate before it has a chance to reach the roots of the plants. (How much water evaporates depends on various factors, such as how you water, the soil and air temperature, and how windy it is.) Watering early in the morning ensures that plants have adequate water when they are actively growing and that less water is lost to evaporation.

Automatic timers can help you apply the right amount of water at the best time of day. They also reduce the risk of leaving a sprinkler or a hose on for far too long and wasting water (let's face it, most of us have made that mistake).

## Set priorities

If water is in short supply, the order in which plants are watered is key. For example, trees and shrubs should be watered before turf.

Many turf species will go dormant if left unwatered and can recuperate from an extended

period without adequate water. Trees and shrubs, however, will most often not recover.

When making water allocation decisions, make sure to consider the types of plants growing in your landscape.

## Consider a drip irrigation system

Not all plants need to be watered with sprinklers. On hot or windy days, sprinklers may waste water.

They may also cause the leaves of shrubs and trees to be more moist than normal. If this excess water does not evaporate promptly, it can lead to an increase of certain fungal and bacterial diseases.

Drip irrigation systems offer an efficient alternative. They apply the water precisely to the plants you are trying to grow—and apply less to areas where weeds will grow.

There are many options for drip irrigation systems and configurations. Drip irrigation can be used with perennials, annuals, trees, shrubs, and even in vegetable gardens. Different emitters can be used to increase or decrease the amount of water provided to each plant.

When using a drip irrigation system, it is important to regulate the amount of pressure and ensure proper filtration. If you have questions regarding drip irrigation, consider talking to an expert at your local UW Extension office, conservation district, or garden club. They can provide you with

starting points for implementing drip irrigation in your landscape.

For more information on reducing water usage and keeping your landscape healthy, visit [bit.ly/BBWYwater](https://bit.ly/BBWYwater).

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### Suggested irrigation prioritization in times of drought

This list is based on an article from Utah State University, which can be found at [bit.ly/usu-prioritize-home-irrigation](https://bit.ly/usu-prioritize-home-irrigation).

Priority #1: Trees

Priority #2: Shrubs

Priority #3: Perennials

Priority #4: Annuals

Priority #5: Turfgrass