Become a Water-Wise Gardener
(continued)

- Don't water the driveway or other paved surfaces. Make certain sprinklers are aimed in the right direction and that runoff is directed toward vegetated areas.
- Help prevent surface runoff. Don't apply water faster than it can be absorbed.
- During drought emergencies, check with the Maryland Department of the Environment at 1-800-633-6101 as well as your local health department to learn whether you may use recycled or "gray" water from laundry or dishes on gardens.
- Purchase a rain barrel equipped with mosquito netting to store rainwater runoff from down spouts.
- Learn more about Xeriscaping, a method of gardening that uses drought tolerant plants and a combination of practices to reduce water usage. Visit the Home and Garden Information Center's web site listed below to download a fact sheet on Xeriscaping.

Maryland Department of Agriculture
Office of Resource Conservation
50 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401
410-841-5863 | mda.state.md.us

Maryland Home & Garden
University of Maryland Extension
Home and Garden Information Center
12005 Homewood Road
Ellicott City, MD 21042
1-800-342-2507 | hgic.umd.edu

Financial assistance provided by the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, administered by the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Grow It Eat It — Maryland's Food Gardening Network

Martin O'Malley, *Governor* | Anthony G. Brown, *Lt. Governor* | Earl F. Hance, *Secretary* | Mary Ellen Setting, *Deputy Secretary*

MDA 15.09.11 | Recycled paper

Protect the Chesapeake Bay

Like farmers, homeowners play an important role in protecting our soil and water resources, especially the Chesapeake Bay. This series of fact sheets highlights various conservation measures—best management practices—that farmers use to produce healthy crops and protect water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Homeowners can apply these same conservation measures to home, lawn, and garden projects. Working together, we can make a difference for the Bay. For more information on ways to improve your lawn or garden and protect the Bay, contact the organizations listed on the back panel.

Maryland Department of Agriculture

Backyard Actions for a Cleaner Chesapeake Bay...

5

Make Every Raindrop Count—Use Water Wisely

Farmers know the importance of conserving water, not only during periods of extreme dry weather, but throughout the growing season and beyond. Just as most of us are taught from childhood not to waste food, water conservation is similarly ingrained in the farmer's psyche.

Farmers use a variety of methods to conserve water. They know that soil composition plays a key role in helping plants cope with drought. The clay soils that are found throughout much of Maryland can harden and become brick-like under prolonged hot, dry, sunny conditions. To conserve moisture and reduce evaporation on sun-baked crop fields, farmers leave the stalks and leaves of harvested crops on the ground to create a type of natural mulch for newly planted crops. This practice, known as conservation tillage, can reduce evaporation by up to 35 percent. Winter cover crops of rye, wheat or barley also help farmers conserve water. They help slow down rainwater runoff, control erosion, and recycle leftover nutrients remaining in the soil after the summer harvest. When lack of rainfall threatens the survival of a crop, farmers rely on high-efficiency irrigation systems that are designed to minimize evaporation and maximize the amount of water that reaches a crop field. During the past several years, many areas of Maryland have experienced persistent drought conditions, prompting backyard gardeners to keep an eye on the sky while practicing water conservation techniques in earnest. If you rely on the garden hose to keep your lawn green and your garden lush and attractive during dry conditions, consider the following water-wise tips.

Coping with Drought Conditions

- Be aware of water restrictions in your area. Watch or listen for news reports or contact the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) at 1-800-633-6101. Drought information and restrictions will also be posted on MDE's web site, mde.state.md.us.
- Obey both voluntary and mandatory restrictions.
- If outdoor watering is restricted and you are limited to using a hand-held container or hose with an automatic shut-off valve, establish a priority system for your plants. First, determine which landscape plants are most susceptible to water stress. Large shade trees and mature shrubs can usually fend for themselves unless they begin to show signs of wilt or their root systems have been recently disturbed.
  1. Newly planted trees and shrubs should be given priority.
  2. Perennials, fruit trees, and vegetables are next in line.
  3. Established turf, ornamental grasses and annuals should be placed at the bottom of your watering priority list. These are usually drought tolerant.

The Grass Isn't Always Greener

Many species of turf naturally go dormant during the hot, dry summer months. It is not necessary to water grass that has gone dormant. The grass will green up once the rains return. Here are a few more tips to help see your lawn through the inevitable dry spells that we experience in Maryland.

- Don't select grasses that need a lot of water. Tall fescue is both drought and pest-resistant. Call the HGIC at 1-800-342-2507 or visit hgic.umd.edu for recommendations.
- Mow the grass higher than usual to prevent scorching, reduce weed problems, shade the soil, and conserve moisture.
- Don't walk on grass that has been stressed by drought. This will further damage the grass. Footprints and a blue grey appearance are signs that a lawn is thirsty.
- If you must water your lawn (and watering of grass is not prohibited), do so early in the day with a sprinkler. As a rule, water less often for longer lengths of time. Avoid frequent, light watering—it promotes shallow root growth and encourages weeds.
- Aerate your lawn to reduce soil compaction and help water penetrate more deeply into the ground.
- Don't reseed or fertilize your lawn during the summer dormancy period. Late summer or early fall is the best time to reseed lawns (between August 15 and October 15 for Central Maryland).
- Fertilize lawns between September and December, as long as the ground is not frozen. Never fertilize if heavy rain is forecast.
- It is unnecessary to apply fertilizer to lawns in the spring. Doing so may contribute to nitrogen runoff.
- Don't plant grass where it won't grow. Grass is not always the best choice for steep slopes, shady areas or walkways. Problem areas will only get worse during dry conditions. Plant ground covers instead.
- Perform a soil test in the fall and follow the recommendations to improve your soil. Soil testing information and soil sample bags are available by calling the HGIC at 1-800-342-2507 or visiting hgic.umd.edu.

PLANT SMART

Use native and beneficial plants that grow here naturally and are adapted to Maryland's climate and soil types. The plants shown here may need watering until they are established or during extended dry periods, but they should hold their own in most Maryland backyards with minimal care and maintenance. Contact your local nursery or the Home and Garden Information Center (HGIC) for additional suggestions.

PERENNIALS

ADAM'S NEEDLE YUCCA
Yucca filamentosa

BLACK-EYED SUSAN
Rudbeckia hirta

BLUE WILD INDIGO
Baptisia australis

GREEN AND GOLD+
Chrysogonum virginianum

EASTERN OR WILD COLUMBINE
Aquilegia canadensis

NEW ENGLAND ASTER*
Aster novae-angliae

SOLOMON'S SEAL
Polygonatum biflorum

TICKSEED SUNFLOWER*
Coreopsis tinctoria

SHRUBS/GRASSES

AMERICAN BEAUTYBERRY
Callicarpa americana

PINXTERBLOOM AZALEA*
Rhododendron periclymenoides

NEW JERSEY TEA*
Ceanothus americanus

RED OR BLACK CHOKEBERRY
Aronia arbutifolia, A. melanocarpa

SOUTHERN ARROWWOOD*
Viburnum dentatum

SPICEBUSH**
Lindera benzoin

WITCH HAZEL
Hamamelis virginiana

SWITCH GRASS
Panicum virgatum

SMALL/MEDIUM/ORNAMENTAL TREES

AMERICAN HOLLY
Ilex opaca

WHITE FRINGETREE**
Chionanthus virginicus

DOWNY SERVICEBERRY**
Amelanchier arborea

EASTERN REDBUD**
Cercis canadensis

SHADE TREES

BLACK LOCUST**
Robinia pseudoacacia

CHESTNUT OAK*
Quercus prinus

COMMON PERSIMMON *
Diospyros virginiana

PIGNUT HICKORY*
Carya glabra

PIN OAK*
Quercus palustris

RED MAPLE
Acer rubrum

PITCH PINE*
Pinus rigida

WHITE PINE
Pinus strobus

Photo Credits
+ Courtesy of Horticopia
* ©USDA, NRCS@PLANTS
** ©William S. Justice, Smithsonian Institution@PLANTS

Give Landscape Plants, Shrubs, and Trees a Fighting Chance

- Watch for signs of stress caused by drought. Wilted, curled, dull, yellowed, or brown leaves and undersized fruits and vegetables are signs of thirst.
- Use mulch to help plants retain moisture and reduce evaporation. A two-inch layer of mulch or compost is recommended. Too much mulch will prevent water from reaching plant roots.
- Condition your soil. Water does not easily penetrate clay soils and passes too quickly beyond plant roots in sandy soils. Mix in organic matter to increase the penetrability of clay soils and the water-holding capacity of sandy soils.
- Water landscape plants early in the day to reduce evaporation. Avoid watering at night—it promotes disease.
- If you must water at night, keep water off plant leaves.
- Create a shallow depression around newly planted trees and shrubs to catch and hold water.

Become a Water-Wise Gardener

- Don't waste water; repair leaking hose connections.
- Use a rain gauge to monitor rainfall and apply additional water to plants only if needed.
- Check the soil in your garden or flower bed before watering. Wilting plants are not always thirsty—they could be getting too much water. Using a screw driver, dig 4 to 6 inches to see if the soil feels moist and cool. If so, leave it alone.
- Shut off the hose when moving between plants or purchase a water wand with a shut-off valve.
- Invest in a soaker hose or drip irrigation system to further conserve water. Slow, steady watering at the root area reduces evaporation substantially.
- Turn off automatic, timed sprinklers when it rains and when rainfall has been plentiful.

(List continued on back panel.)