

Planning a water-efficient garden

A water-efficient garden is designed to meet your lifestyle needs without wasting water, regardless of your local climate. Benefits of a water-efficient garden often include reduced water bills and garden running costs, and less maintenance.

Waterwise garden design and management practice reduces water loss through evaporation, maximising the water content of your garden soil. This extends the period your garden can survive on stored moisture, reducing the need for watering.

Planning your water-efficient garden

Good planning and design of your garden—whether new or a renovation—will ensure it is water efficient, practical and enjoyable. Below are some key tips for setting out your garden.

Considerations

- ◆ What are my existing garden features?
- ◆ What will the area(s) be used for?
- ◆ How much space is needed for recreation; for example, lawn or patio?
- ◆ What do I want in my garden?
- ◆ How much maintenance will be required?
- ◆ Does my garden need screening for privacy, noise, wind and shelter?
- ◆ What is my budget?

Start with a plan

Draw a scaled plan of your property showing:

- ◆ the location of the house
- ◆ the orientation of the sun
- ◆ other structures such as a pool, pond or paths
- ◆ existing vegetation.

Analyse site characteristics

Now include the following on your plan:

- ◆ views you want to emphasise
- ◆ views you want to screen
- ◆ drainage patterns of the property
- ◆ changes in soil type.



The design

Your design should be simple to ensure easy maintenance and water use efficiency. Reflecting nature, by reducing tight curves and unnecessary bends, will make maintenance and watering easier.

Plan areas for different uses

Indicate the following area of your landscape:

- ◆ public area—such as the entrance to the home (typically this receives the most care)
- ◆ private area—where most outdoor activity occurs, such as your backyard (this area needs to be functional, attractive and durable)
- ◆ service area—a working space that may house rubbish bins, outdoor equipment, air-conditioning units or a kennel (typically screened from view).

If you would like a compost bin or heap in your garden think about where you would like this to be situated.

Incorporate shade into the design

Shading makes your garden more water efficient. Shade from trees or structures reduces water loss and helps create a comfortable living environment. Identify areas where shady trees, shade sails or other structures could be incorporated into your plan.



Establish water-use zones

Identify your desired water-use zones. Group plants according to their water requirements, so that you only need to water smaller defined sections of your garden. Several zones may be included within your garden:

- ◆ High water-use zones are small, highly visible and highly maintained areas such as the front garden and the area around the patio. In these areas, plants are watered regularly if there is no rain; however you could supplement your watering in this area with your greywater, providing your plants are greywater tolerant. Try to keep high water-use zones to a minimum.
- ◆ Moderate water-use zones have established plants which require watering only when plants show symptoms of moisture stress, such as wilting or changing colour.
- ◆ Low water-use zones are those where the plants receive no water except natural rainfall, for example areas of bushland, well-established trees or natural turf areas. Try to locate low water use plants in the most exposed, hottest, position in the yard.

Designing the lawn

Consider the appearance and intended use of the lawn. Sunlight is essential to growing a healthy lawn, particularly in the winter, so make sure that the area gets adequate sun and is relatively level. A slight slope to allow excess water to drain away is also desirable.

If you don't need a lot of lawn, consider reducing your current lawn area and replacing it with mulched garden beds to reduce water loss. When replacing or renewing turf, choose a drought-resistant variety and make sure it is suitable for your soil type. For more information, refer to the *Maintaining your lawn* information sheet on the Department of Environment and Resource Management website <www.derm.qld.gov.au>.

Irrigation or watering

Adopt an efficient watering approach. Water early in the morning or during the evening, and not on windy days, to reduce water loss from evaporation. Use water-efficient irrigation products, labelled as such by Irrigation Australia Limited or the Smart Approved Water Mark program.

Be aware of water restrictions in your area and water your garden only as restrictions allow. For information on current restrictions in your area visit your local council's website. For South East Queensland visit <www.qwc.qld.gov.au>.

Consider all these things before you choose your turf and plants. The Waterwise Plant Selector <www.derm.qld.gov.au/waterwise/plantselector> or your local nursery can help you find plants that are the most water efficient for your local conditions.

More information

Other water-efficient gardening guides are available on the Department of Environment and Resource Management website <www.derm.qld.gov.au/waterwise>.