



Landscape Management for Persistent Drought

Urban landscaped environments are being challenged by water woes in California. When tuning in to the news, one knows that today much of the state is in a severe to exceptional drought (US Drought Monitor). What does this mean for plants and trees? It increases the pressure (and benefits) for communities to work proactively with their landscape management professionals to develop and implement a plan to sustain landscaping in the short and long term.

MAINTENANCE: 5 THINGS

Communities likely have a capable landscape management professional team. Work together with them to shift focus on water use reduction. Communities that prioritize landscape water efficiency will fare better financially and aesthetically in the short and long term.

Address some simple, cost-effective strategies that reduce water use with little financial input. Most items on the following list are inexpensive or included in monthly service contracts.

Continued on next page.

U.S. Drought Monitor California

June 8, 2021

(Released June 10, 2021)

Valid 8 am, EDT.

Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

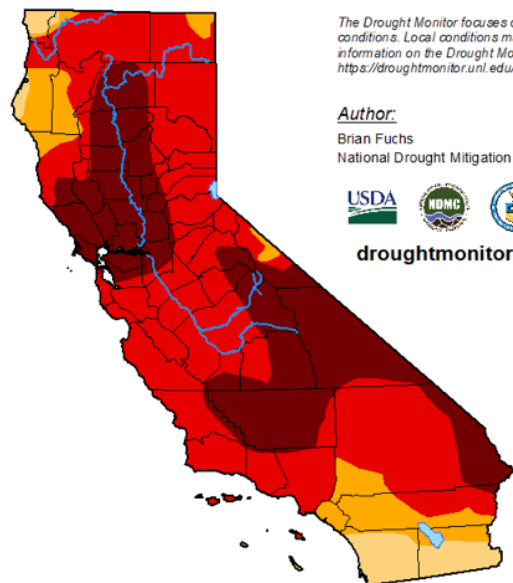
The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:

Brian Fuchs
National Drought Mitigation Center



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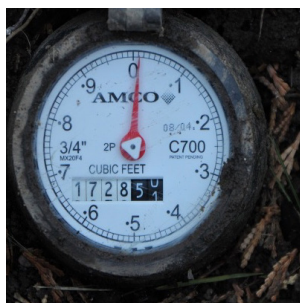


1. **Immediately conduct a Visual Irrigation Inspection.** Each station on each controller is turned on and observed during normal operation. From there, a punch list for timely or on-the-spot action can be completed.

2. **Monitor water usage at the meter(s).** Landscape committees can read meters and document readings. Comparing the community's on-site cumulative water use logs to water bills provides a better understanding of current vs. historical use and trends. Monitoring and

Visual Irrigation Inspection

Adjustments	- Align nozzles to irrigate only desired areas. - Straighten tilted heads. - Check and adjust system water pressure.
Cleaning	- Clean debris from nozzles and screens. - Flush drip lines. - Clean drip valve filters.
Obstructions	- Prune or remove plant material blocking sprinkler trajectories. - Raise sprinkler risers above plant material.
Minor Repairs	- Fix minor leaks. - Add check valves for low head drainage. - Replace broken fittings, heads, wiper seals. - Cap unused heads. - Plug or replace failing drip emitters.
Major Repairs	- Obtain and prioritize proposals for major repairs like leaky valves, mainlines, nozzle and/or head replacements, drip retrofits. - Be sure to research and maximize use of applicable rebates.



Water meter. Image courtesy of QWEL San Diego.

measuring also helps identify potential leaks early. And it provides opportunities to recognize (celebrate) reductions. Water providers have historical data and should be consulted for its availability. Community monitoring can be set up on a simple Excel worksheet.

3. Prioritize landscape areas.

Draft a map of first, second and third priority irrigation areas. This will be important for creating a long-range upgrade plan. (The topic of the

second in this three-article series.)

- a. **High profile, high use areas**, entrances, activity centers, signs and wild land buffer zones may justify only a minimal reduction in water use.
 - b. **Low profile, hidden, less trafficked** and least utilized areas can be targeted for greater reductions.
 - c. **Transformation opportunities** can provide dramatic irrigation reductions. Consider turf areas that might be transformed into more useful, less thirsty environments.
4. **Adjust irrigation schedules.** Once landscaped areas are prioritized, watering schedules can be adjusted at the controllers. This must be a thoughtful process, not just a blanket reduction by a certain percentage on each controller. Soil type, slopes, irrigation type, plant species and weather are among the many factors considered. The schedule should be clearly documented and included in each controller.

5. **Mulch!** All irrigated areas should have **soil covered at all times**. A minimum of 3"- 4" of coarse wood chips absorb water and reduce evaporation. Keep mulch a few inches away from the bases of trees and shrubs (like a donut ring). This mulch blanket will dramatically reduce the required frequency of supplemental irrigation. And many arborists are happy to supply their chipped tree trimmings at little cost.



Wood chip mulch. Image by Rowan Adams, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

LEARN MORE!

Attend the Echo Virtual Seminar on July 17th, 9 am – 1 pm to build or refresh your knowledge of sustainable landscaping, soils and landscape water budget principles and practices. The presentation that day will be excerpted from the WaterSense recognized and award-winning Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL) training program. Go to www.echo-ca.org to register!

NO TIME TO WASTE

Communities that make landscape water conservation a priority now will be well positioned to foster attractive, resource conscious and sustainable sites well into the future.

It all starts with managing what is on site at this moment. It may require a shift in community focus and maintenance tasks. But there is no time to waste.

This article is the first in a series of three that outlines strategies to help focus community efforts on conserving irrigation water while maintaining landscape health and value.

Starting with maintenance, what can be done today to reduce landscape water use?

Next month, strategies for plant and irrigation upgrades.

Lastly, paying for maintenance and upgrades, including budgeting and rebates.



Author Tiffany Faulstich is President of Botanicon Inc, an independent, third-party horticultural and landscape consulting firm. www.botaniconsd.com



ECHO – Executive Council of Homeowners
5669 Snell Avenue, #249 | San Jose, CA 95123
(408) 297-3246 | www.echo-ca.org