

# The Garden Corner

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Master Gardeners of Johnson County Missouri

Being blessed with rain lately has probably caused many of us to forget about the hot and dry months coming just around the corner. It will not be long and the use of water will be increasing our monthly living expenses. Consider this conundrum: useable water has become a scarce resource and is already a major problem in our western states. Given the situation, doesn't it make sense to adjust our habits and become better stewards of what we have been given? Fortunately, there are several proven strategies we can employ to conserve our consumption of this precious resource.

First on any avid gardener's list should be the liberal use of mulch. While I don't particularly endorse the use of rock (doesn't add anything to the soil and creates an artificial heat island); any material you decide to use will reduce your watering requirements. Well, "if you don't like rock, what do you use?" I'm glad you asked! Every flower bed at Hidden Harbor Gardens is covered with four to six inches of leaf mulch or mold. Why? Three reasons: (1) it's free, (2) its water retention capacity is five times its weight, and (3) at the end of the year, it gets tilled into the soil thereby adding to the structure of the dirt. Any leaf will do except those from walnut and Osage orange (hedge) trees. Just as a reminder, if you use wood chip mulch remember to add extra nitrogen to your beds because the wood chips use nitrogen as they decompose.

Another successful proven strategy is the time of day you decide to water. If at all possible, watering should be done early before the heat arrives and begins working its magic of evaporation. A study done at the University of Iowa conducted to measure the efficiency of watering times demonstrated by watering at 8 am as opposed to 2 pm saved a full one half of the water required to achieve the same results. That is impressive by anyone's standards! Plus, if you have plants which are susceptible to mildew, by watering in the morning you are allowing the leaves of the plants to dry thoroughly before evening thereby reducing the risk of developing mildew.

Here's another idea: Use soaker hoses instead of overhead watering. By placing the soaker hoses under your mulch and positioning them within the root zone of the plants you are virtually eliminating the evaporation aspect and you are putting the water where it is needed most.

One last thing and then I've got to go weed and water: Think "native plants". Once these natives are established (2 to 3 years), the amount of water needed is greatly reduced. They have evolved to handle our hot and dry summers; AND, they are highly appreciated by the local pollinators.

Got any questions? I'm here for you. Write to 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email: [mandpak@embarqmail.com](mailto:mandpak@embarqmail.com) and between weeding, watering, and mowing I'll get back to you. Be careful out there, take care of yourself, and drink plenty of water. Talk at you next month .....