



STRATEGIES FOR STAGE 3 WATER RESTRICTIONS

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Unfortunately, it is here – Mandatory Stage 3 Water Restrictions. They went into effect because we are in critical water shortage conditions according to Corpus Christi Water - combined water storage levels are below 20%.

Aransas County and nearby areas get our water from the San Patricio Municipal Water District, which purchases it from Corpus Christi. Under Stage 3 Restrictions landscape watering is prohibited, even with drip irrigation or a hand-held hose.

Plants that are native to our area can naturally survive extended periods of drought - just one more reason to plant natives. They might not look their best, but they should be all right. There are a number of strategies we can implement that can help all our landscape plants – apply compost, apply mulch in certain areas, cut back plants, utilize water from downspouts, and collect water being run until it gets hot.

Even a thin layer (1/4 inch) of compost can be of benefit during drought because it can increase water infiltration into the soil and retain water. This is particularly beneficial in our sandy soil. It would be wonderful to be able to apply a layer of compost to the entire landscape, including the lawn, but it is not very feasible. So, apply it to as many areas as you can, beginning with areas or around plants that are more water needy. Compost will also work its usual magic of improving the soil structure, providing plant nutrients, and feeding soil microbes.

Mulch is great for reducing evaporation from the soil but when we are only getting light rain or fog drip, certain mulch materials will absorb the rainfall before it gets to the soil. Under our current conditions, apply mulch in between plants but leave a bare area of at least a foot around small plants and several feet around large plants so any moisture can come in contact with the soil.

Once we get a soaking rain of several inches, then mulch can be filled in closer to the plant base, but an uncovered area should still be left. Mulch made from plant materials such as leaves and wood chips will eventually break down, add nutrients, and improve the soil structure. I really cannot say enough good things about the benefits of mulch, but at this time, go easy on it.

Smaller plants use less water than larger plants, so as long as they are not stressed right now, cut them back. Depending on the plant and your situation, cut them back to a foot or so above ground, or just trim them back a bit to reduce the leaf area.

Collect or divert water that would be wasted. If you have gutters and downspouts on your house or building, make sure that water is being used well – flexible plastic extensions for downspouts can direct the water to landscape plants, or collect it if possible. Indoors, quite a bit of water goes down the drain unused when waiting for water in the shower or at the sink to get hot. Put a 5-gallon bucket in the shower, and any appropriate container in the sink, to catch that water. Then use it to water your plants.

Although water restrictions are not mandatory inside the house, a large amount can be conserved there. Remember to turn off the faucet whenever you are not actively using it – for example when in the kitchen or brushing teeth. Do not rinse your dishes before putting them in the dishwasher (unless genuinely required) and remember using a dishwasher takes a lot less water than handwashing. Run it, and the washing machine, only when there is a full load.

Read the City of Rockport webpage on water restrictions, including the useful FAQs, at: <https://rockporttx.gov/494/Water-Plan> for much more information.