



“MASTER GARDENER (MG) MARCH 22 PLANT SALE INCLUDES INFO ON HOW TO GET THROUGH THE DROUGHT”

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The clean water we are fortunate to have coming out of our faucets is supplied by the San Patricio Municipal Water District (SWMWD) which serves the area north of Nueces Bay and Corpus Christi Bay on the South Texas coast. Whoever gets their water from SPMWD must follow their water use plan.

Stage 3 mandatory water use restrictions went into effect for customers throughout the Coastal Bend in December when the combined water storage levels dropped below 20% and will remain in effect until levels reach 30%. See sanpatwater.com for more information.

Stage 3 rules prohibit all landscape watering (including with a handheld hose), washing vehicles, except at a commercial car wash where the water is recycled, and adding water to swimming pools except to prevent damage. Watering of foundations if needed is allowed only once every other week. Watering potted plants and vegetable gardens only with a handheld hose is allowed.

There are fines for residential, commercial, and industrial customers who violate the mandatory restrictions.

What can we do for our yards and landscapes? The best thing to do right now is to put mulch on everything -- trees and shrubs in the landscape and all container-grown plants. Use an organic (as in, it was once alive) mulch, rather than rocks or something synthetic. A product that is more finely ground is preferable for potted plants. It is extremely important to keep the mulch off the trunk or woody stem of the plant as it can potentially cause rot.

Mulch is great for water conservation not only because it cuts down on soil evaporation, but it can increase water absorbency. Sometimes soil that has gotten very dry will have trouble absorbing water which then might just run off. Mulch takes in the water and then it can soak into the soil (if enough rainfall fell, or water was applied). It may be preferable to apply a thin (1/2" – 1") layer for now until that day I am waiting for when we get substantial rain. Then pile on a couple more inches of mulch.

There are multiple advantages of mulch – it reduces weeds, moderates the soil temperature, and adds organic matter to the soil as it breaks down – adding nutrients and increasing the water and nutrient holding capacity of sandy soil and improving the

structure and drainage of clay soil. A thin layer of compost also absorbs rainfall and adds nutrients and organic matter.

Adding ½” of compost to the grass will have many of the benefits of mulch without covering it up. When it is time to start mowing, use the highest setting on your mower. It is less stressful for the plants and the slightly taller grass shades the soil enough to reduce some evaporation. Be sure to let your grass clippings drop (do not bag them). Like mulch, they will add nutrients, improve the soil, and reduce evaporation. Hold off on fertilizing since it will encourage growth that will use more water.

For the longer term, select native plants for the landscape, they are happy in our primarily dry climate. Plant with water conservation in mind. Some other practices: convert to drip irrigation, it is by far the most efficient irrigation method; add shade to your yard with a structure, a sunshade, or by planting trees. In addition, install a rain barrel to collect rainwater to water your landscape, and aerate compacted lawns and add compost to increase water infiltration into the soil.

There are many ways to conserve water inside the house. Run only full loads in the washing machine and dishwasher-it is much more efficient. Do not rinse dishes before loading them in the dishwasher; modern dishwashers are designed to clean dishes that are not rinsed. Not sure about yours? Just scrape the dishes, load them, and give it a try. It will save time, water, and money! Using the dishwasher is more efficient than handwashing dishes, especially if there are just a few at a time.

An easy practice is to stick a bucket in the shower to catch the water that runs until it gets warm. Use it to water outside plants. It is fine to use shower water with some soap in it on landscape plants. Use a smaller container, perhaps a dishpan, at the kitchen sink for the same purpose. A lot of water goes down the kitchen drain that could be used to water plants. Think about capturing rinse water for produce, leftover coffee or tea (mixed with other water), pasta, potato, and egg water, and even “used” ice cubes.

Never use the toilet as a trash can to dispose of tissues and other items. Just throw them in the actual trash can and save water. Flush your toilet only when you really need to. If every person in the Coastal Bend flushed their toilets one less time every day, it would be a significant water savings.

Learn about these and other water conservation practices at the Master Gardeners Spring Plant Sale March 22, 9:00-1:00, featuring educational displays and demonstrations. Native and other low water use plants will be for sale. The event is at 892 Airport Rd., Rockport. Call 361-790-0103 for more information.