



SWITCH TO DRIP IRRIGATION
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Even though El Dorado County has had a lot of rain this winter, we are still behind and another drought like what occurred a couple of years ago will undoubtedly happen again. We live in a Mediterranean climate (hot, dry summers and rainy, relatively mild winters), which means conserving water during those hot, dry months of summer is crucial. As home gardeners, we can do our part by switching to drip irrigation in our landscapes.

Drip irrigation technology applies water slowly and directly to the targeted plant's root zone which is where water is needed. Other advantages include the fact that diseases are minimized because water is not contacting leaves and stems, thus avoiding a lot of fungal problems, weed growth is minimized because areas between plants remain dry and last, oddly shaped areas or hilly terrains are much better irrigated with drip systems than overhead sprinklers.

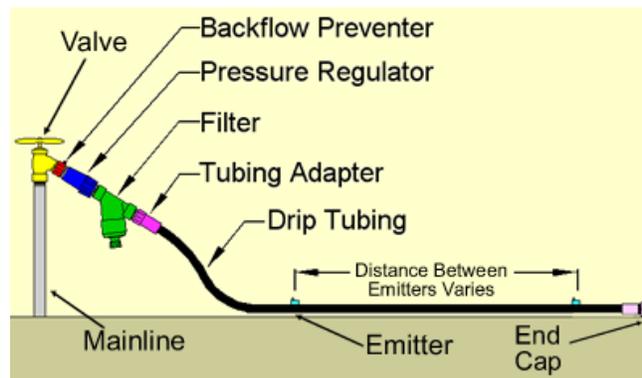
Drip irrigation involves placing tubing with appropriately spaced emitters on the ground alongside the plants, and the emitters slowly drip water into the soil at the root zone. Initially setting up a drip irrigation system is time intensive, but once it is done, the only maintenance necessary is periodically checking to see that emitters are functioning properly and not clogged; many gardeners walk around their landscapes on a weekly basis to see that everything is working properly. Newer tubing is much better than in the past and does not deteriorate as quickly when exposed to sun. It can be covered with mulch if the appearance on top of the ground is not appealing, but one word of caution . . . it is a good idea to take a picture of a system once it is installed and before covering with mulch. This lessens the chance of cutting into it with a shovel or other garden tool.

In recent years, in-line drip irrigation has become available. This innovation precludes having to punch into lines to insert emitters because they are already installed inside the drip tubing. Manufacturers claim that this type of system does not become clogged with dirt or insects and is much better adapted to being covered with soil or mulch. Spacing of the built-in emitters is usually every 12 to 18 inches and can be used in straight rows in a grid pattern, as in vegetable beds, or wound around a landscape in various patterns.

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What about turf areas? Unfortunately, these do not lend themselves well to drip irrigation due to the large expanse of roots that need to be watered. Ideally, large areas of lawns should be removed or at the very least, reduced drastically in size. If a gardener must have a small turf area, overhead sprinkler heads can be replaced with MP rotator heads. Rather than simply spraying water onto landscapes with resultant water being lost to the atmosphere, these deliver multiple streams of water at a steady rate. MP rotators can be installed onto any conventional spray head body or shrub adapter.

If you are completely new to the concept of drip irrigation, the illustration below is an excellent example of the various components that go into making a drip system work. Two items that are very important to include in the system are a filter placed in the component attached to the valve (to prevent small dirt particles from getting into the tubing), especially if your water is supplied by a well, and a pressure regulator; drip systems need a much lower PSI (pound-force per square inch) than what normally comes out of a valve.



Everyone needs to do their part for water conservation and in the garden, utilizing drip irrigation is a big step toward helping reduce water use.

Learn more with Master Gardeners Sheri Burke and Cheryl Turner at their presentation on “Irrigation,” Saturday, April 28 at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville. 9:00 a.m. to noon, the class is free, on-campus parking is \$2.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook