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Water-wise Tips for an Unthirsty Landscape

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With the hot days upon us, we are reminded how dry our summers are here in California. With a lack of rainfall and in anticipation of future drought conditions, it is time to give those water hoses a break!

The University of CA, Agriculture, and Natural Resources (UCANR) has many informative publications on the conservation of water used for home lawns and gardens. With a well thought out plan, we can still have beautiful outdoor spaces in El Dorado County.

Initially, determine the type of yard space that you have to work with. Do you have sun or shade, level or sloped? Do your outdoor space needs include room for entertainment, play areas for children or dogs, colorful flowers, or growing veggies? Your preferences will help plan your yard, and determine best options for irrigation.

Next step, assess the type of natural soil in your yard. Soil texture has a lot to do with water retention and drainage. If necessary, soil will need to be amended and fertilized. Hardpan or compacted soil will need to be tilled or broken up prior to planting.

Consider limiting the amount of lawn, and be sure to plant "warm weather" turf, which requires less watering. Set your mower on high. Hardscape adds structure and flow to a yard. To assist with water-wise practices, use permeable paving items. These consist of crushed granite, stone, beach pebbles, and an occasional boulder for interest.

Select plants that have similar water requirements. Consider a drip system, which is the most efficient way to water flowers, and vegetables. Slow, deep watering encourages growth. Colorful,

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unthirsty perennials are hard workers. Plants can be a mix of CA native, or non-native varieties. Consider lavender, salvia, CA poppies, and natural grasses. The birds, bees, and butterflies will love these floral additions.

Keep weeds under control, and remember to mulch, mulch, mulch! Your plants will appreciate that insulating layer which helps retain moisture in the soil, and discourages weeds.

Watering our yards wisely is everyone's responsibility in dry-summer California. Smart landscape design and gardening practices can make a big difference. You will be rewarded with a beautiful landscape which almost takes care of itself!

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. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind the Folsom Lake College-El Dorado Center. We're open 9:00 a.m. to noon, Fridays and Saturdays.

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/mastergardener> e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.