

1. Water your yard (AT MOST) an inch a week, gardens less

A brown lawn is not a dead lawn. Grass naturally goes dormant in the summer and will green up again in the fall when the rain begins to fall. If you must water don't over-water. Over-watering not only wastes water but carries toxic fertilizers and pesticides into our rivers, lakes and streams. Your grass needs at most an inch of water a week and established gardens usually require less. It's best to water your lawn separately from gardens and shrubs. You can measure your watering using inexpensive rain gauges or tuna cans placed randomly around the yard. If you don't have an automatic sprinkler system or timer on your sprinkler, use a kitchen timer to remind yourself to turn off the water. The best watering practices for your lawn are to water infrequently but deeply (at **most** one inch per week!) That encourages deep root growth and keeps the soil moist. Soaker hoses and drip irrigation are great for watering your plants because they deliver water slowly and evenly to the roots, decreasing loss to evaporation and saving up to 60 to 70% over hose watering.

2. Water according to the weather

Pay attention to the weather. One inch per week includes rainfall. Decrease watering time during cool or humid conditions. If it's rained moderately that week you won't need to! A good downpour can eliminate the need to water for several weeks. If you have automatic sprinklers be sure to turn them off if rainfall has been sufficient for your yard's needs. If you have a "smart" controller it will do this for you.

3. Water in the morning or in the evening

Watering in the early morning hours is best because that's when temperatures and wind speed are the lowest. This reduces loss from evaporation and the possibility of disease. If you can't water in the morning, watering in the evening is the next best thing. Don't water during the heat of the day.

4. Fix broken sprinkler heads

Regularly check your irrigation system to make sure it is operating correctly. Broken sprinkler heads don't put the water where it's needed and can waste hundreds of gallons of water. Make sure you use the proper sprinkler heads for your watering needs. A well-designed system that is properly maintained and regularly monitored by you will provide your lawn with the water it needs, while conserving water.

5. Don't water pavement

Streets, driveways and sidewalks don't need to be watered. Position your sprinkler or sprinkler heads so that water lands on the lawn and shrubs. Don't use water to clean off driveways or sidewalks. Use a broom instead. Don't wash your car - car washes are more efficient and recycle their water. Using a hose on your sidewalk or car can waste hundreds of gallons of water.

Smart watering is just one of five steps to a healthy and natural Northwest yard. There are five steps to Natural Yard Care. If you use all five of these steps you will reduce water consumption and have a healthier yard.

Build healthy soil with compost and mulch. Building healthy soil helps plants develop deeper roots and reduces pest and weed problems. Mulching is also a great way to hold water in the soil, meaning you can water less!

Plant right for your site. Choose plants that are right for the location in which you are planting them. Talk to your nursery professional when selecting plants. Consider the amount of sun and water they will receive and the soil conditions. When possible consider choosing native plants or plants that require less water.

Practice smart watering. As we have discussed above, watering in moderation is best for most plants. Water only what your plants need. Watering slowly and deeply will encourage deeper roots and less need for watering.

Think twice before using pesticides. Keeping your plants healthy will eliminate the need for many pesticides. You can also encourage natural pest killers, like ladybugs, to eliminate unwanted pests.

Practice natural lawn care. Use a mulch mower to leave clippings on the lawn and provide moisture and nutrients. Mow high and less often. Grass naturally goes dormant in periods of drought but will green up again when water becomes available. Reduce fertilizer applications.