



# Ballard News-Tribune

## **Drought will be tough, but not fatal to gardens**

It's official: 2005 is a drought year, and it's going to be worst drought in 28 years. What does the drought mean for gardening?

First and foremost, I do not want to see everyone running out and purchasing drought-tolerant plants, planting them, not watering them, and then wondering what went wrong. Even drought-tolerant plants need supplement water while they're getting established.

Ditto for native plants. Yes, native plants are typically more suited to our soils and climate, but they, too, need water to become established.

Here are my suggestions for gardening through the drought.

1. Postpone lawn renovations until fall. We usually recommend overseeded and starting new lawns in either spring or fall, but with no supplemental rainfall, it's just not a good time for new lawns.
2. Postpone major garden installations until fall. I hate to say this, as I have many friends in the nursery and landscape industry, but it's going to be a tough year for major new plantings. Consider postponing your planting until the rains return this fall.
3. Tolerate some damage. Lawns will go dormant early this year, and that's OK. They'll be green again this fall, and besides, brown is this year's black. Some leaf scorch on established evergreens is tolerable, but major dieback of any plant is a red flag. Tolerate some damage, but don't let everything die, either.
4. Follow irrigation advice from the Washington State Department of Ecology and other civic organizations. They will tell you how much you can water, when, and why. Be smart. I had one client a few years ago who "heard there was a drought" (there wasn't) and turned off the drip irrigation system on their new brand-new \$35,000 landscape installation. That's not smart.
5. Consolidate your container gardens and use larger containers. Rather than watering several small (less than 24 inches in diameter) containers daily, pot larger container gardens. These hold water longer and are lower maintenance.
6. Use water retention material in your potting soil. Available from all garden centers, these products help

potting soil trap and hold water, requiring you to irrigate less frequently. (I don't care to use these in the ground, as I like to garden organically, but those of you not opposed can certainly experiment!)

7. If you haven't already, install a drip irrigation system. I can't emphasize enough how efficient these systems can be. As my garden expanded, my water bill actually decreased (however slightly). Dripworks ([dripworks.com](http://dripworks.com)) sells starter kits that are inexpensive and easy to set up.

8. When you must irrigate, water early in the day.

9. Consider using gray water to irrigate your landscape. A friend of mine has a shower that's slow to warm up. Rather than let the cold water run down the drain, she's collecting it in a bucket to water containers on her front porch. Look around and see where you can get creative about water reuse.

10. Limit the operation of water features. Those of you with fountains and ponds that need regular filling will want to pay close attention to water warnings.

As for me, I'm going to simplify my containers and other plantings this spring and cruise through the year weeding, entertaining in the garden, and enjoying the sunshine — because we know the rain will come again another day.

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