Saving Water in the Yard

- 1. Water less frequently but more deeply. Think of your soil as a reservoir that holds water for your plants. Watering to the root depth of your plants creates a healthier and more efficient garden. For lawns in clay soil, this means applying ½ inch of water to moisten the soil to a depth of 6 inches; water shrubs even more deeply and less frequently. You can determine how long it takes to apply ½ inch of water by setting out several catch cans, running your sprinklers, and measuring the time it takes to fill them with ½ inch of water. Lawns planted in very sandy soils will require less than ½ inch each watering day but more frequent application. Another method of determining how deeply you are watering is to water for five minutes, then probe the soil with a garden spade to see how deeply you have moistened the soil. For example, if five minutes of irrigation moistens your clay soil to a depth of two inches, you would need to water for fifteen minutes to moisten the soil to a depth of six inches. Note that this test will only work during the dry season.
- 2. Adjust your irrigation controller according to the seasons. Your garden does not need as much water in April as it does in July. Add days to your watering schedule for the summer season and then reduce the number of days as fall approaches. Lawns, the thirstiest of plants, will require watering a maximum of three times per week in the hot summer months and one or two times per week in the spring and autumn. Perennials and shrubs require less frequent watering than lawns.
- 3. **Reduce urban runoff caused by long irrigation cycles**. Use your irrigation controller to break up the application of water into shorter run times. For example three, five-minute applications with an hour in between will allow the soil to absorb more of the applied water that one 15-minute application. That way, more water will reach your plants' root zone in an irrigation day. This is especially important when your lawn or garden is planted on a slope or in clay soil, which absorbs water slowly.
- 4. **Exchange your irrigation controller for a Weather-Based Irrigation Controller.** A new generation of products are available that will automatically adjust your irrigation schedule based on actual weather conditions. These controllers can prevent irrigation when it rains, and apply more water to your garden during unexpected hot and dry spells. You save water, money, and have healthier gardens.
- 5. **Routinely check your irrigation system for leaks**. Very often we do not see our sprinklers when they are operating. It takes only moments to run through all of your stations to make certain there are no broken or misadjusted heads.
- 6. **Choose drip irrigation.** Drip irrigation systems apply water more accurately and at a much lower rate than overhead spray. Water is measured in gallons per hour instead of gallons per minute. Slow, accurate application of water to the plant roots prevents water from spraying and running off on walkways and into gutters. A well designed drip system is durable and there is even sub-surface drip irrigation for lawns. EBMUD offers rebates to customers that install drip irrigation systems, for details visit www.ebmud.com and select "Conserving & Recycling" and "Residential" or contact 1-866-40-EBMUD (1-866-403-2683) or custove@ebmud.com.
- 7. **Select plants that are adapted to Mediterranean climates**. Whether adding to your existing garden or replacing existing plants, choose Mediterranean or California native plants that will thrive on less summer water. There are many plants available to create a colorful, interesting, and lush garden well suited to the climates and soils found in our region. Many of these plants are featured in EBMUD's new publication, "Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates of the San Francisco Bay Region" (see back side for more info).

- 8. **Group plants in Hydrozones**. Use separate stations to irrigate plants grouped together according to their high, medium, or low water needs. Mixing high and low water use plants that are watered by the same irrigation valve or station makes in impossible to apply the correct amount of water.
- 9. Apply mulch & compost to your garden. Mulch is the "secret weapon" of water conservation in the garden. EBMUD recommends at least three inches of mulch to maintain moisture in the soil, suppress weeds, protect the irrigation system from the harmful rays of the sun, and give the garden a finished look. Organic mulch, such as wood bark or compost will also amend the soil as it decomposes. Never apply mulch right up against the main stem or trunk of a plant.

For more information on **EBMUD rebate programs and eligible water saving products**, contact custsvc@ebmud.com or call toll-free 1-866-40-EBMUD (1-866-403-2683).

For more information on **Home Composting**, including free workshops, how to resources and discounted compost bins visit www.cccrecycle.org, contact cccrecycle@yahoo.com or call the Contra Costa County Recycling Hotline at 1-800-750-4096 x2.

Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates

This 336-page book features more than 650 native Californian and Mediterranean plants suited to the climate and microclimates found throughout much of California and the West. Over 500 color photos show plants in garden settings that blend well with natural surroundings and reduce reliance on water.

Chapters include information on:

- Climate and natural plant communities
- Garden design and maintenance
- Inspiration for creating lush landscapes while conserving water
- Limiting green waste
- Protecting creeks and providing habitat for wildlife
- Charts and lists to assist in selecting plants for special situations
- Gardens that attract butterflies and birds
- Information on each plant's needs for sun and water, frost tolerance, and soil preferences

EMBUD worked closely with local gardeners, landscape designers, horticulturists, and nursery owners to reflect their hands-on experience with growing these plants in the nine counties of the greater Bay Area. For ordering information, visit:

www.ebmud.com/conserving_&_recycling/plant_book/

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Does your landscaping need help?

Is your yard already established but you haven't a clue how to care for the perky, bright yellow blooms at the entry? Contra Costa Water District offers a free WaterWise Gardening CD-ROM packed with information specifically designed for soil & weather conditions in Contra Costa County. For ordering information, visit: www.ccwater.com and click on "Conservation".

