

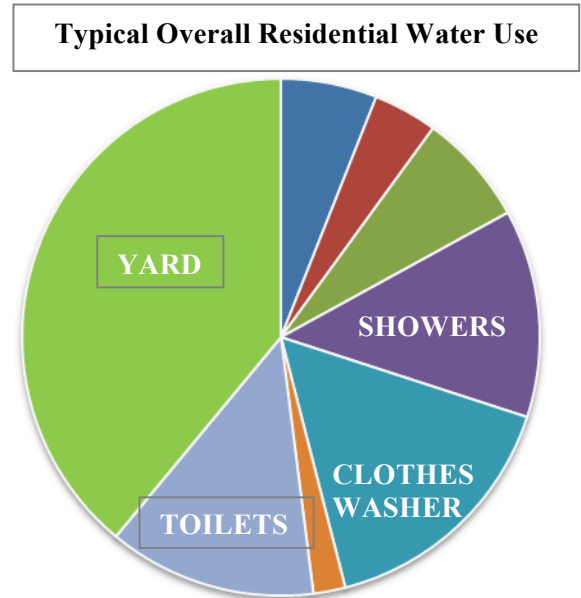
Watering in Good Conscience

Water has become an important issue for Lincoln. In an effort to protect the wildlife that depends on streams and rivers, the Department of Environmental Protection continues to reduce the amount of water Lincoln and other towns are allowed to withdraw from the watersheds. Responding to state mandates, the Lincoln Water Department has imposed strict restrictions on outdoor water use.

The largest residential water use by far is for watering lawns and gardens. Lincoln's daily water use nearly doubles in the summer! As home gardeners, we know that proper water amounts and timing are critical to plant health but we also want to conserve water. So here are a few tips for conserving water use while enjoying the benefits of our too-short New England gardening season.

Lawns are the biggest drinkers. Because most outdoor water use is for lawns, we encourage residents to minimize grass areas. Small green oases of lawn winding among shaded areas of trees and interesting ground covers provides a much more interesting yard than a large sterile rectangle of grass. It's even better if the non-lawn areas feature drought-tolerant native plants that attract birds and beneficial insects such as bees. However, since many of us still have sizable areas of grass, here are some water management tips for lawns.

1. Letting your grass go 'brown' during prolonged dry weather actually improves lawn health. Grass becomes naturally dormant during hot, dry periods. It will revive quickly after a good rainfall or when the weather turns cooler.
2. Set your mower as high as it will go (3 to 4 inches). Longer grass retains more moisture because it shades the roots and competes better against weeds.
3. Use a rain gauge; it can be as simple as an empty metal can. One inch of water a week (rain plus supplemental watering) should be plenty to keep a lawn green. After heavy rains, you may not need to water for 10-14 days. Frequent light watering actually weakens your lawn by encouraging shallow roots that are less tolerant of dry periods and promotes growth of ticks, mosquitos, and fungal diseases.
4. If you use sprinklers or in-ground irrigation systems, water in the early morning (Lincoln water restrictions specify before 7 A.M.) to minimize water lost to evaporation and to allow



the grass to dry out; wet grass can burn in the hot sun. Watering in the evening can increase susceptibility to disease.

5. Choose fescue grasses which do better than bluegrass during periods of low rainfall and are slower to go dormant.
6. Better yet, let the lawn “go native”. Left alone, small native plants that need neither fertilizer nor water will take over and provide a sustainable green turf. The grass areas around the Lincoln schools are a good example of native turf.

Gardens and Shrubs: Right Plant, Right Place. While it is easier said than done, experienced gardeners know that the type of plant and where you place it are critical decisions for a thriving garden. Here are some common-sense water-conserving tips.

1. Be aware of the various zones in your yard (hot/sunny, cool/shady, moist, dry, etc.). Hot, dry zones need plants that can endure hot, dry conditions; shade-loving plants need shade!
2. Group plants that need extra care. If you choose shrubs, flowers or vegetables that need lots of sun *and* moisture, place them near each other so you can water just one area.
3. Use drought-tolerant plants. A list of them can be found at :

<http://www.uri.edu/cels/ceoc/documents/sustman.pdf>

<http://extension.umass.edu/landscape/fact-sheets/drought-tolerant-plants-landscape>

4. Mulch to keep roots moist and reduce water evaporation from the soil. Mulch also minimizes weeds that would otherwise compete for available soil moisture.
5. Add compost to the soil to retain moisture. Composted leaves, manure, kitchen vegetable scraps and grass clippings keep soil moist and also feed your plants.

Watering in Good Conscience Part 2 will discuss various watering methods.

Additional Resources for watering information:

1. <http://www.uri.edu/ce/healthylandscapes/tips/1.html>
2. Concord Water & Sewer: (Note: The free offer on this site is for Concord residents only)
http://www.concordnet.org/pages/ConcordMA_Water/Saving%20Water%20Outdoors
3. <http://www.mwra.com/comsupport/conservation/gardeningtips.htm#waterlawn>
4. Right Plant, Right Place by Nicola Ferguson

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