



Make every drop count!

By Nanette Londeree, Master Rosarian

We're half-way through a hot summer and the worst drought in our local history. With limited availability of water, EVERY DROP counts! Be on the lookout for any drip or leak and find a way to eliminate it. Water only plants and adjacent soil, not any hard surfaces around them. Turn water off when moving from plant to plant; no need to water soil where weeds might pop up. Keeping your roses and other plants healthy, even with water restrictions, can be easier if you have the right tools for the job.

There are plenty of ways to water plants, from a simple watering can to a sophisticated automated irrigation system with built in weather sensors. What use depends in part on the size and configuration of your garden, the types of plants you're growing, how much time and energy you want to use to irrigate, the cost of the tools or systems you install and maintain, and the method's efficiency.



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Hands down, for most gardens, drip irrigation is the way to go. Drip irrigation works by placing water slowly and directly into the soil—literally “dripping” it in from small water emitters placed one or more at each plant or using specially designed distribution line with built-in emitters. While it can be costly to install with a good controller and automated valves, it is absolutely the most efficient way to irrigate your garden. [Learn more about drip irrigation](#)

If a fully automated system isn't an option, and you rely on manual tools, then,

Start with a good hose

Most gardeners use a hose to water at least a portion of their plants. With so many options to choose from, here are some important things to consider:

Material: Most garden hoses are made of rubber, vinyl, or a combination of the two. A basic vinyl hose (usually reinforced with a radial cord) is the least expensive and most lightweight option but also the least sturdy, and is more prone to kinking, splitting, and cracking than other materials. Rubber hoses are generally the strongest, longest lasting, and less likely to kink or crack, but are often the most expensive and can be heavy to haul around the garden. Composite rubber/vinyl garden hoses (usually reinforced with a mesh lining between layers of vinyl and/or rubber) are more resistant to kinking and splitting and can take higher water pressure levels.

Size: Garden hoses come in 25-, 50-, 75- and 100-foot lengths. Longer hoses cost more, they're heavier to move around, need more storage space, and can result in lower water pressure coming out the use end. Determine what need by measuring the farthest distance from your faucet buy a hose that goes just beyond that. Common garden hose diameters (inside diameter) are half inch, five-eighths inch, and three-quarter inch. The bigger the diameter, the more water the hose will carry. A five-eighths inch diameter is generally the most useful with good water flow and pressure without being too heavy. If hose weight is a concern, try a half-inch diameter hose.



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Couplings: Garden hose couplings are the end pieces that attach to faucets, sprinklers, and nozzles. Less expensive hoses often have plastic couplings that are more prone to leaks, cracks, and breakage, and often can't be tightened properly. Metal couplings are either stamped or cast. You can identify cast brass because it's thicker than sheet metal and usually has an octagonal shape so the coupling can be turned with a wrench. Couplings made from cast brass are the most durable and leak resistant. Thin stamped-metal fittings can be difficult to tighten at the spigot, bend easily, and break down over time. [Learn more about hoses](#)

So many nozzles to choose from

There are hundreds of types of hose nozzles on the market - different styles, flow rates, costs, materials, and more. The type you choose depends on how you plan to use it. A nozzle with a single spray pattern may be adequate. If you're looking for more versatility, one with either a dial for switching between different spray patterns, or one that twists to produce everything from a sharp stream to a fine mist, like the example on the right, may be a good option.



Comfort is an important consideration, especially if you have arthritis or hand / wrist strength issues. The pistol grip is the most common type of hose nozzle; it has a squeeze trigger that activates water flow. When the grip is released, the water flow stops. These often include a metal loop by the trigger that can lock the handle in the spray position taking pressure off the hand. No-press grips allow for changing water flow with a button or a slider so it can be manipulated with a thumb.

For watering plants in hard-to-reach places or if bending is difficult, a watering wand might be the answer. Like nozzles, wands come in numerous models and lengths. [Learn more about hose nozzles](#)

Shutoffs, quick-disconnects, timers, and washers

A must have to conserve every drop of precious water is a hose-end shutoff valve. You can save considerable water by cutting off the water supply while moving from plant to plant. Most shut-off valves have a lever to open and close the valve; some are integrated into the nozzle or wand. Don't have one yet? Get one for free by emailing Marin Water at Conservation@MarinWater.org



Have you tried quick disconnects? They are a real time and labor saver if you have multiple faucets or hoses, and attach different tools like nozzles, sprinklers, and soaker hoses to them. Rather than screwing and unscrewing accessories every time you make a change, once fitted with disconnects, it's as simple as unplugging one tool and plugging in the next. They are generally sold in sets that include a male and female part. Attach the female part to the end of your hose, and the male to the tool you're using, then put them together and click in place. Simple! Available in metal and plastic, the brass types are the most durable. [Learn more about quick disconnects](#)

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Never forget to turn your water off again! In-line timers can be water saver by shutting off water flow when your desired time reached. Simple mechanical types connect between the hose and the water faucet. You just wind to the duration you want, like a kitchen timer. More elaborate digital timers that run on batteries allow you to program when to turn on, off, how long to run, and how frequent. There are even models now that are solar powered!



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Finally, it might seem like a small detail, but always use rubber washers when connecting your hose nozzle to your garden hose. Your chances of springing a leak will decrease drastically.



Soaker hoses

Want to give your roses a slow deep watering, but aren't ready for drip irrigation? A soaker hose might be the way to go. Most often made from recycled tires, the hoses' rough surface contains millions of tiny pores that allows water to seep into the soil evenly and slowly. Available in a variety of lengths, just weave the hose through the rose plants keeping a few inches between the hose and the base of the plant. Turn on the faucet, and the hose will deliver water right to the soil with no spray or run off. [Learn more about soaker hoses](#)

Get some extra help

Want to learn more ways to reduce water usage right in your own garden? Sign up for a Marin Friendly Garden Walk, a partnership between UC Marin Master Gardeners and Marin Municipal Water District. The free hour-long Garden Walk consultation by two Marin Master Gardeners provides homeowners in Marin with information and advice on improving their irrigation practices and conserving water. To make an appointment complete this [online request form](#). A Marin Master Gardener will contact you to confirm your appointment. [Learn more about Garden Walks](#).

Need irrigation work done in your garden? Hire a QWEL (Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper) professional. QWEL is a program of the Sonoma-Marín Saving Water Partnership, 12 water utilities in Sonoma and Marin counties that have joined together to provide regional solutions for water-use efficiency. QWEL Pros have been trained in efficient irrigation principles and sustainable landscaping practices and can help to use water efficiently in your landscape, reduce runoff and overspray, select and install efficient irrigation equipment, develop your irrigation schedule and program your irrigation controller. Hire a QWEL Pro – [click on the link](#) and enter your ZIP code; you'll get a listing of QWEL Pros for hire within a 25-mile radius.

Our “normal” rainy season is still months away; give some (or all!) of these watering tips a try to conserve every drop of precious water we have, while keeping your plants healthy and ready to take off next season.

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