**Primetime**

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**Landscape Activities in a Drought**

The dry weather and heat this summer set records for a one year period. It was a challenging time for those of us who want to have an outstanding landscape. The challenge continues because the forecast for rainfall is not optimistic. There will be better times for gardeners but in the meantime consider these ideas.

* Comply with whatever drought management rules are in place within your community, but utilize the flexibility allowed to maintain your landscape. The San Antonio Water System (SAWS) rules, for instance, were developed to reduce water use but also allow that enough water is available to keep everything in the yard alive, including your lawn.
* Aerate and top dress the lawn. The most environmentally appropriate and one of the most effective treatments for the lawn is to aerate and then top dress it with compost.

The action addresses compaction and introduces organic material to the soil where the grass roots operate. Water can penetrate better and gases escape more effectively.

* Avoid landscape projects such as major sodding or rejuvenation that require extra water in the short term. Assess every project for its long term water demands and select projects that reduce water demands. New lawns are especially demanding; when you finally decide to put it in, insist that there be six inches of soil for any new lawn. The soil makes a lawn reasonably efficient.
* Tackle the portions of landscape projects that are water neutral. If you want to convert your lawn to a xeriscape landscape, planting the required shrubs, perennials, groundcovers, and trees will require high water use. You can, however, incorporate the compost into the soil and mulch the area so that planting can be done when the weather breaks.
* Some area water purveyors, including SAWS, offer rebates and other incentives for conversion to low water use plants and improvement of the technology of your irrigation system. There are also publications available that provide information to make your landscape more beautiful, easier to maintain, and water efficient. Visit SAWS website at [www.saws.org](http://www.saws.org) and click *Conservation* for information on the resources.
* Do not accept the idea that a lush and colorful landscape cannot be achieved in a responsible manner. Plant flowers for the winter but instead of the full contingent of small transplants, consider fewer total plants but use larger stock. The larger plants make more impact sooner than small plants, and can require less total water than a large planting of small plants.
* Containers can also be used for major impact with less water. Several containers of snapdragons in full sun or cyclamen in deep shade near the front door or driveway entrance attract attention away from a winter dormant lawn with minimal water investments. On the patio use dianthus, pansies, stocks, and cyclamen in containers for high impact plantings.
* Do not be pound foolish and penny wise on plantings. A newly planted shade tree will take some water to become established, but fall is the best time to plant and the return in reduced water needed for a shaded lawn and the saving in air conditioning costs, make it a good investment even in the midst of one of our frequent droughts. Mulch over the root system to reduce water needs.

This fall you can also take advantage of CPS Energy’s rebate for planting a well adapted, well placed shade tree. Visit the CPS Energy website at [www.cpsenergy.com](http://www.cpsenergy.com). Your favorite nursery may also have the rules of the rebate and an application sheet.