

Drought Restrictions and Options

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The Edwards Aquifer level has fallen below 660 ft MSL and San Antonio is back in drought restrictions. The rules allow you to use your sprinklers only one day/week between 7am and 1PM in the morning or 7PM and 11PM at night on the day of the week that relates to the last digit in your address (0 or 1, Monday; 2 or 3, Tuesday; 4 or 5, Wednesday; 6 or 7, Thursday; and 8 or 9, Friday)

You can use drip irrigation in Stage 1 on any day, but it should be during the 7AM to 11 AM or 7PM to 11PM hours. Soaker hoses are counted as sprinklers for the Drought Restrictions. Soaker hoses are the green plastic hoses that put out a fine spray when used right side up. They are leaky hoses when you turn them over so that the water seeps directly on the ground. The theory at SAWS seems to be it is too easy to turn the spigot to high pressure which results in excessive amounts of water being applied. Ideally a soaker or leaky hose can be used at low pressure (one half turn) so the water just sweats or leaks out just as efficiently as drip irrigation.

It is important to correct leaks and never allow water to be wasted by letting it run down the road. To deal with uneven application rates and problem spots in the lawn, hand watering is allowed at any time. Also use hand watering for containers and for newly planted trees and shrubs.

The Drought Restrictions allow San Antonio to do its part to protect the endangered species and other downstream interests with minimal stress on our landscapes and economic activity, and without having to own extra amounts of expensive water. Water that would only be used in drought times, but would have to be paid for at other times when it was not needed.

Here are some other practices to consider:

- Bermuda, zoysia, and buffalo grasses can be allowed to go dormant if you would prefer to quit irrigating the lawn. The grass will turn brown after about 3 weeks of no water, but there will be no permanent damage. The lawn greens up again as soon as the rains restart.
- Even San Augustine in sun can tolerate to go 3 weeks between irrigation episodes. That would mean it is not a major disaster if you miss one or 2 weeks of your scheduled watering. The lawn will not be lush green if it only gets irrigation once every 3 weeks, but research results indicate it will still be alive and responsive to changes in the weather.
- Well established, well-adapted plants like oak trees, hollies, and Texas mountain laurel should not require supplemental irrigation. They evolved in drought conditions and can survive.
- Newly planted shrubs and trees however do not have an extensive root system developed so they may need supplemental hand watering at the base, so it is certain that the root ball is wetted. Treat plants less than 2 years in the ground as newly planted. Also watch for any sign of drying out of plants in stressful situations like slopes or parking lots. They may need the supplemental watering at the base.
- Use mulch to reduce evaporation from moist soil. In the short term mulching dry soil may slow the entry of moisture from light rains, but it is beneficial in the long run.

- Drip irrigation is more efficient for watering perennials, flowers, and vegetables than sprinkler irrigation. Sprinklers are generally unsuccessful in providing adequate water for newly planted trees and shrubs. Review SAWS incentives for improving your irrigation situation.
- Fruit trees develop their fruit buds in the summer before the fruit is produced so they must receive adequate irrigation now if they are going to bear fruit next spring. Use drip irrigation and water enough to keep the foliage thick and green.