Taking The First Step

Wondering how to get started to make your garden more California Friendly®? You don’t have to do a major renovation. Here are some ideas that will save water, improve plant health, and reduce run-off – all California Friendly®.

**Tune-up your Irrigation System**

An irrigation system that has leaks, broken parts and isn’t working properly can be the biggest water-waster of all.

- Use the [Irrigation System Checklist](#) to identify problems.
- Make your own repairs or hire someone to do them. The [California Landscape Contractors Association](#) can help you find irrigation contractors in your area.
- Create a watering schedule tailored to your garden and set your controller. Adjust the time with seasonal weather changes – and turn it off for rain.
- Use a garden moisture meter to water your plants deeply enough for the roots to grow deep into the soil. The soil in the root zone should be moist, not saturated.

**Aerate your soil and lawn**

Over time, soil compacts and forms an impenetrable surface. Aeration breaks up the hard surface so the water can soak in to give your plants more oxygen, nutrients and water. And you’ll see less water running down the street.

- For planter beds, use a hand tool to gently turn the surface of the soil. Be careful working in the root zones so you don’t damage your plants.
- For lawns, use a manual coring aerator (available at home improvement stores) or rent a machine – either one is easy to use. Water 1 to 2 days before you plan to aerate to moisten the soil so it doesn’t compact around the holes. Make 2 to 3 passes over each area, with holes about 3-inches apart.

**Irrigation Upgrades**

Irrigation technology is rapidly advancing to meet the needs of California Friendly® gardens. If you’re ready for a little more challenge, consider upgrading your irrigation components for high-tuned efficiency and performance.

- Install a Smart Controller that automatically adjusts the watering time and frequency based on soil moisture, rain, wind, evaporation and transpiration rates or plant type. Check out some of the [Smart Controllers](#) that are on the market. [Rebates](#) are currently available for single and multi-family residential, commercial and municipal sites. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for installation and initial set up.
- Change spray heads in lawn and shrub areas to low-precipitation multi-stream rotators. The multi-stream rotators use up to 30% less water than traditional spray heads because they apply water more slowly and evenly.
- Use bubblers, drip irrigation or low-volume spray heads in planter beds. Drip irrigation may be a good choice in shrub areas where kids and pets aren’t likely to accidently disconnect a drip line.

**Plant Changes**

Ready for a new look in your California Friendly® garden, but not ready for a total makeover? It’s easy to change plants in a small area. Be sure to match sun, water and space needs.

- Create a hydrozone in one area of your yard. A hydrozone is where all the plants have similar water needs so you can water efficiently.
- Select California Friendly® plants that have low water needs, leaf and flower color you like, and won’t grow too big for the spot.
Mulch your plant beds

Water quickly evaporates from bare soil. Mulch minimizes water loss, helps control weeds, and returns nutrients to the soil as it decomposes. Keep it replenished – it will help your garden look terrific.

- Spread a 2 to 3-inch layer of mulch in plant beds and around trees. Keep mulch away from the base of shrubs and trees to prevent decay and disease.
- Click here for instructions on a weekend mulching project.

- After planting, be sure to mulch and adjust your sprinkler controller for the valve that will water your new California Friendly® area. Remember, most new plants need a little more water until they get established. Once they get growing, turn the water down to only what they need.

Design Changes

For those tired of the “same old” look or mowing the lawn that no one uses, an overall design change to California Friendly® may be the answer. Take at look at some wonderful Garden Tours and Garden Galleries to get ideas.

Work in soil amendments to build in nutrients and improve water percolation.

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