

# Drought Preparation Techniques

## **If Phoenix is in drought, will there be restrictions on water use like there are in other cities and states?**

It is possible that there will come a time that water use restrictions will be put into effect. The focus for residents will be on outdoor water uses, such as lawn watering, car washing, and outdoor water features. Water used for commercial and industrial use would be restricted differently based on how water is used at each site.

## **What should I do to prepare for drought?**

There is no “one” way to prepare your home or your business for drought. Below are some suggestions to help you determine what steps are the best for you to reduce your water usage. Do a personal water audit of your home or business to understand how you are using water both indoors and outdoors.



The most likely place drought will impact the average homeowner or business owner will involve how water is used outdoors. Though the city of Phoenix is currently NOT requiring residents and businesses to reduce their water use, depending on the severity of drought and the length of the drought, the following are possible measures the city MAY require from residents and businesses if drought conditions continue:

- Cut water off to decorative fountains and ponds;
- Only allow irrigation on certain days;
- Reduce total irrigation water use;
- Ban on planting new grass or replanting existing grass areas;
- Total cutoff of all outdoor irrigation;
- Increase costs for excessive water use;
- Ban on filling or maintaining water level in pools unless they are covered.

There are measures you can begin to plan for and implement now that will limit the possible impact of these types of required water reduction measures, should they become necessary. Below are some suggested actions you can take to minimize the impact of drought and water reductions. Other tips will be posted occasionally on this website.

### **Triage your landscape**

Take a look at your trees, shrubs, and turf. This is the time to plan for the possibility of having to curtail irrigation water later on. Decide ahead of time what plants in your landscape are the most important to you, and which ones are most easily replaced later should you have to let them go during drought. Assign priority to the trees, shrubs, turf areas and flower beds. Generally speaking, trees and large bushes represent the largest investment -- both in time and dollars. They will probably be your highest priority.

### **Evaluate your irrigation system**

If you have an automatic irrigation system, now is the time to take a look at how it is laid out, and to make changes that will help you implement the irrigation priorities you have made. Are trees, bushes and grass areas on the same valve? If they are, change this so you can water the trees without watering the lawn or bushes. That way, making those priority decisions later during more severe drought times becomes easier. To water effectively using zones, a method of setting the zones should be followed.

This also is a good time to make your irrigation system more efficient. You will need to do so during drought, but even if the drought ends, you will be better off with an efficient system.

### **Plant desert adapted or drought resistant plants**

Desert-adapted plants, particularly native Arizona plants, do well in Phoenix and require very little supplemental water once they are established. They represent the most significant opportunity to have a lush landscape and save water at the same time. Most are cold hardy for our severest winters, and will survive very hot summers.

With a little planning and thought, you can have landscaping with minimal water use, and color all year using nothing but desert adapted plants. Because they have adapted to long term dry conditions, Arizona natives such as Foothill Palo Verde with small leaves, Brittlebush with gray leaves, and Creosote Bush with wax covered leaves can survive on minimal or no irrigation. When they do get a little water from rainfall, they burst forth in new growth and color.

Now, while drought impacts are still a few years off, is the time to plant and nurture desert adapted plants. Use enough water to get them well established now and you can maintain them later on little to no supplemental water.

## **Review proper pruning techniques**

We have numerous drought-hardy plants in our urban landscapes. Proper care can assure that these plants survive and thrive even during drought times.

One of the most critical concerns is the pruning of plants. Recent studies by the ASU Center for Environmental Studies indicated that Phoenix landscapes with desert-adapted plants are often over-pruned. Aggressive pruning practices increase water demand because the plant is in a constant state of shock, striving to recover. In many cases, what are constantly trimmed off are the flowers – the most attractive feature of many of our desert plants. As a result, landscapes that could survive on minimal water have become water-intensive landscapes, sacrificed for the desire to trim desert plants into unnatural forms or ‘sculpture’ gardens. Let desert plants be desert plants and they will do fine on much less water – and look more natural as well.

Another important plant care tip concerns using organic mulch in and over the root zone of plants. In our hot dry desert air, mulch use will help shade the ground and plant roots, and will also absorb water in the root zone, extending the use of irrigation water by keeping it where the plant needs it. Homemade mulch can be created from pruned off plant materials and grass clippings. Replenishing it occasionally can keep a plant much happier and save water.

## **Assess using runoff and evaporative cooler water**

Early settlers to Arizona used rain barrels to capture roof runoff from the infrequent rains. While you **SHOULD NOT** drink roof runoff water, capturing rainfall runoff does present an opportunity to store water for a short time and have it available for irrigating critical plants during dry periods.

A rain barrel also can be used to collect the bleed-off water from an evaporative cooler during summer’s cooling season. Most desert plants will do well if fed the cooler bleed-off water, in spite of the higher salt content.