

# The Dirt on Water & Conservation

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by Annie Plowman

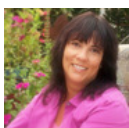
Most of us are very concerned about the water situation in our great state. By now, the powers-that-be are well aware that this is a great concern and that it has had a crippling effect on our economy. For now, most of us are left in limbo while the great politicians hash it out and argue over the future of our state. Some of us have taken opportunities to make our voices heard and all of us are left to wait impatiently. I have a confession to make. I'm not an activist. I'm not super-eco-girl. I'm not a vegan or even a vegetarian for that matter. I sometimes eat at Mc Donald's and I don't drive a hybrid. That said, I've gotta tell you, there are so many simple things that we can do to contribute to our environment and change the world that begin in our own backyard. We can ruin our friends' dinner parties by discussing politics or we can quietly make little changes and talk to our little ones about personal responsibility.

Did you know that watering regulations have changed to once per week for the winter? They have. So dig out that sprinkler manual and tweak those settings. If you don't have time, hit that "rain" button and set them off manually when needed. Did you know that the valves (the big chunky part of the sprinkler system near the house) wear out, break or go bad sometimes and can cause a slow leak than runs the length of the sprinkler system? If that's you. Have it fixed. If your sprinkler system is a major hassle to reach or it needs to be replaced, try this; have the new one wired so that the timer is inside your house. My timers are in the house and I love it. (Thank you handy-husband) I have some pots that receive drip irrigation. Love that! Mine are perched in areas so that when the water drains through them, the water drains into other areas that will benefit from the water. Where does your excess water go? (BTW, I unhook them in the winter)

Ok... This is huge. Well, it's big to me because I think we all should be enjoying our gardens. Did you know that you can waste an enormous amount of water in your garden because of poor soil quality? If you add compost to your soil you will experience less runoff and your plants will thrive on much less water. Add to that the benefit of soil that you can dig in more readily. There are also some great new organic (spread and go) products that work on the soil quality that don't require heavy labor. Feeling industrious? Till in a gypsum product and refresh that compost. Keep in mind, it's not only heavy clay soils that will benefit from compost. Sandy soils will reap water saving benefits from compost as well. Please hear me, good soil can be a huge water saver. Don't be fooled just because you can dig a hole now. If you couldn't dig a hole 2 months ago, your soil has not magically improved. The weather has simply given you a reprieve. What are you doing with the leaves that came down? Do you have some empty plant beds? Holes to fill? Put those leaves in those areas and cover with some good quality compost. Avoid using branches, pine needles, eucalyptus or leaves from fruit trees. If you want to speed the decomposition, you can add some nitrogen rich fertilizer but, I would wait on that until the weather warms up. Most fertilizers are not effective in cold weather.

If you are thinking of ripping out trees and plants because of water fears; give that some careful thought. You could be bringing on a whole new set of problems when all you need to do is make a few adjustments. That shade tree is contributing to the environment (you can ask "Tree Fresno" about the benefit of trees) and that tree is helping to make a big dent in your PG&E bill. Plus, Fresno doesn't have the best air quality. I don't think creating a concrete garden is going to contribute to your quality of life or make a positive. Green is a good thing. Identify what you can be doing better and do it.

Happy Planting!



Annie Plowman is a Customer Service Representative with Belmont Nursery in Fresno. Anne has many years experience in both the retail and wholesale nursery industry. You can reach her at [annie@belmontnursery.com](mailto:annie@belmontnursery.com)