

Opinion

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Courtesy photo

Try drought-tolerant plants and these irrigation tips on your lawn

Is your lawn a slacker? We mean that in the nicest possible way. It's not like your lawn sits on the couch and plays video games all day.

But don't let it fool you into thinking it is working as hard now as it was this summer. Did you know your lawn is only "working" when the sun is out?

In other words, as the days got longer in early summer, your grass received more sunlight, and as a result spent a greater portion of the day "working," soaking up sunshine and growing.



Dirk Marks

SCV Voices

This means you not only needed to mow more often at that time of year, but you also needed to water more.

On the flip side, we're coming into the time of year when the days get shorter — so your grass is only "on the job" when the sun is out.

Also, if your lawn has been living the easy life, being pampered with a 7 a.m. watering every morning, it's definitely out of shape.

Just as we need exercise to maintain strong muscles, our lawns need to be trained to look for water deeper in the soil so they will develop a strong root system.

Now that the long summer days have passed, this is the perfect time to re-evaluate your irrigation needs and landscape layout, and get your landscaping in shape.

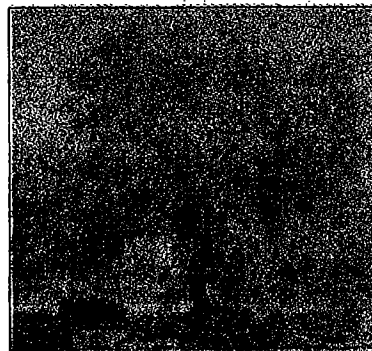
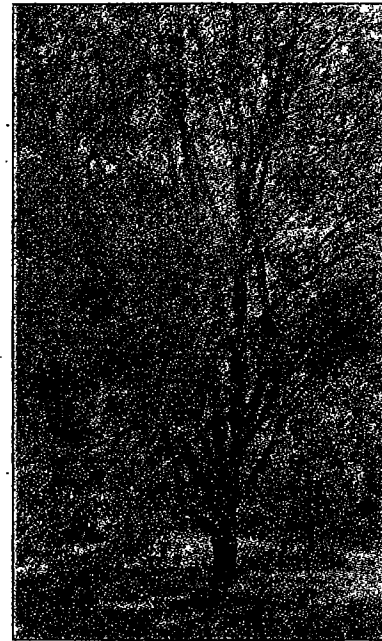
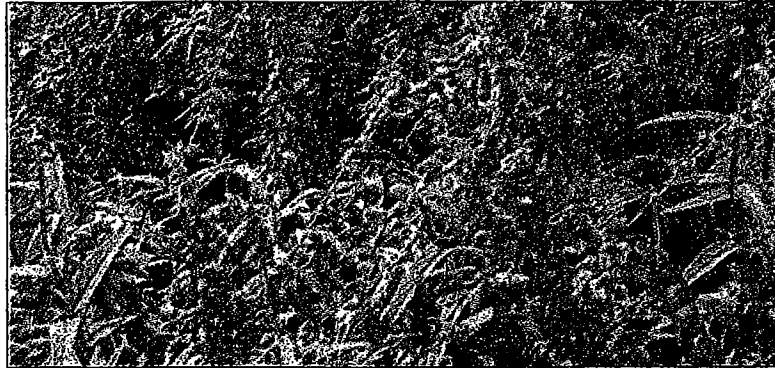
Here at the Castaic Lake Water Agency, we advocate smart irrigation and landscaping choices not only to promote attractive yards and gardens, but also as part of our ongoing advocacy of the most efficient use of our precious water resources.

For starters, this is a good time to analyze just how much water your lawn really needs.

What might have been the ideal irrigation schedule two or three months ago might leave your lawn a squishy bog today — so it's time to cut back, not only the duration of irrigation but also the frequency. In fact, frequency is the more important variable to adjust.

SCV-friendly plants

To save on water, consider planting any of these drought-resistant plants in your yard.



Top: Mexican Bush Sage

Left top: Daylily

Left bottom: Palo Verde

Right top: Chinese Pistache

Right bottom: Wandflower

Photos courtesy Arizona Game and Fish; City of Arlington, Texas; Georgia Department of Agriculture; University of Florida; U.S. Department of Agriculture

As winter approaches and your lawn goes into semi-hibernation, you only need a fraction of the irrigation you needed in July. Your grass may stay perfectly healthy — and less like a squishy bog — if you water only two, or no more than three, times a week.

In the landscape management profession, there is something known as the “crude rule.” That’s not to say it will offend anyone, but it’s a reflection of its simplicity.

It goes something like this: In the summer, you’ll probably need to water your lawn no more than three times per week — or every other day at the most. In the spring and fall, you can cut back to twice

a week.

Once a week in the winter should be more than enough. Believe it or not, if we’re having a “normal” winter in terms of rainfall, you may not have to water at all.

If your lawn springs back up after you step on it, you don’t need to water. (And remember, it’s best to water early in the morning to minimize water lost to evaporation.)

So it’s safe to say, even in the current drought, if your sprinkler timer is set to water every day — or, worse, twice every day — you’re giving your turf a lot more water than it really needs.

If that’s the case, you’ll definitely want to cut your watering schedule, and your water bill, by adjusting the timer.

But be careful not to make your lawn go “cold turkey.” If you’ve been overwatering, your grass may need to gradually adjust to more appropriate watering levels. It’s like training for the marathon. You don’t start out with a 26-mile run — you build up to it.

As one landscaping professional puts it, your turf will need to get used to the notion that “water doesn’t naturally fall from the sky first thing every morning.”

So, pull back gradually until your turf is conditioned to handle the change to more water-wise irrigation.

OK, so we’ve taken care of the watering schedule for your lawn. This time of year, we can scale back on irrigation and, if we get some rain this winter, we may even be able to turn the sprinklers off completely for extended periods of time.

What next? How about your ornamental landscaping choices? Not only is this the right time of year to evaluate irrigation schedules, but it’s also the ideal time to plant new water-wise landscaping.

There are numerous attractive, drought-tolerant plants that perform well in the Santa Clarita Valley’s climate and will help you create a more efficient irrigation schedule.

While your favorite nursery may offer additional specific advice, here are a few suggestions for plants that do especially well in the SCV:

■ **Daylily** — The beautiful yellow flowers make them an attractive addition to any yard or garden, with little “expense” when it comes to water. In fact, people tend to apply a lot more water to Daylilies than they really need.

■ **Dymondia** — This plant is useful as a low ground cover and can even serve as a turf substitute in areas where you don’t need a “playable” surface. It will handle some foot traffic — but isn’t recommended for use in areas where children and pets will play.

■ **Red Fountain Grass** — This plant has a calming effect when its colored tips are swaying back and forth in the breeze. You can find fountain grass in different colors, and it can add a pleasant, relaxing Southwestern feel to your landscape.

■ **Wandflower (or Gaura)** — The Wandflower not only sprouts flowers that resemble butterflies, but also attracts real butterflies when the flowers bloom in June and July.

■ **Mexican Bush Sage** — This plant blooms throughout the spring, and as a bonus for your kids, hummingbirds love it. (We all know what a hit hummingbirds are with children, right?) It will grow vigorously in the spring if you treat it like a rose bush by trimming it back in January.

■ **Society Garlic** — This perennial plant produces flowers that look like little lavender or purple six-point stars. Society Garlic performs best in full sun, so bear that in mind when choosing its location.

■ **Chinese Pistache** — This is a hardy shade tree that produces spectacular red and reddish-orange color in the fall. It’s pest-resistant and tolerates not only drought but also different soil varieties.

■ **Palo Verde** — This tree is native to the Southwest, and is comfortable in a desert environment. Its seedlings are sensitive to drought in the first few months of their lives, but become much hardier after that.

■ **Fruitless Olive** — Fruit-bearing olive trees can be messy, but the Fruitless Olive solves that prob-

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