



www.theurbanfarmer.ca

8 Tips for Water Conservation in Urban Areas:

- 1. Increase the level of organic matter in your soil** - Healthy soils should contain at least 5% organic matter (humus). Not only does a high level of organic matter foster a living and vibrant soil that nurtures your plants, it also absorbs and retains up to 50% more water than soils that are low in organic matter. This means that your plants can much more successfully survive during times of drought. Regular addition of locally made compost is the best way to increase the level of organic matter in your soil.
- 2. Use organic mulches** – Soils that are left exposed to the air invite evaporation and dry out quickly. By using organic materials such as leaves, shredded bark, wood chips, newspapers or grass clippings, you are conserving water in the soil. Organic mulches also reduce compaction and are eventually broken down into humus.
- 3. Reduce lawn area** – Most lawns require relatively large amounts of water, not to mention a high degree of maintenance. Consider alternative ground covers, additional shrub beds, organic mulches or “naturalized” plantings of native species as an alternative. Alternative drought tolerant lawn seed mixes are also now available.
- 4. Chose drought tolerant plant species** – Trees, shrubs and perennials differ tremendously in their water needs. By choosing species (often but not always native) that can thrive in dryer environments, you can have a lush yard with little need for supplemental water. Group your plantings together according to their water needs, placing the most drought tolerant species in the driest areas and vice versa.
- 5. Harvest rooftop rain water** - By connecting rain barrels or larger containers to your downspouts, you can hold water until you need it the most. Rain water is much healthier for plants than treated municipal water. An 1100 square foot house in Edmonton will typically provide 38,500 litres of harvestable rain water from April to October.
- 6. Grade your landscape to deliver water to where you need it** - Most often, our urban yards are graded to move water quickly off our property. By modifying the contours of our landscape, we can direct that water to our trees, shrubs, and gardens while ensuring that it does not enter our basements. Swales (shallow depressions on contour) help to slow down the flow of water and allow it to percolate into the soil.
- 7. Consider using grey water in the landscape** – “Grey water” is household water from sinks, bathtubs and washing machines. Using grey water can be as simple as placing a basin in the sink while washing dishes and using it to water a tree, or it can be more complex and automated (see www.oasisdesign.net). Grey water use must be approached with caution and may be regulated by local codes or by-laws.
- 8. Modify your watering habits** – If you are using supplemental water in your landscape, watering in the early evening or early morning is most effective and efficient. Consider using drip-lines and avoid overhead broad casting sprinklers. Watering infrequently but deeply helps plants to establish deep roots that can better withstand drought.