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## Preparing Your Garden for Drought

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Water agencies across California are bracing for a drought year, and either preparing or have already implemented water restrictions. As resources become more and more limited water districts are going to require more mandatory water savings measures. Landscape lawns and plants can be a major water user, but there are some simple steps you can take to make your garden more water efficient.

### Take a look at your irrigation controller:

For many people their landscape controller goes untouched in a back corner of the garage, or is the exclusive domain of their gardener. Basic controller operation is easy; take some time to walk through your controller programming and basic functions. Most controllers have .pdf versions of their manuals online. Your controller needs to be adjusted seasonally based on temperature, rainfall and the water needs of your plants. While this can be intimidating at first, once you get the hang of the water usage patterns for your garden, it is easy to make adjustments.

In Marin, [MMWD has recommendations online](#) for the amount to water plantings and lawns that is updated each week based on weather conditions. Use this as a starting point, and then make adjustments either up or down based on observation and the needs of your garden. For dormant periods in the winter and early spring for example, MMWD recommends not watering plants unless they show signs of wilting.

There are also an increasing variety of technologically advanced sprinkler controllers that make automatic adjustments based on temperature, rainfall and humidity. Depending on the type, you can install a small localized weather station for your garden, or have data beamed directly to your controller. You can find an outstanding overview on [Smart Controllers from the San Francisco Chronicle](#).

### Upgrade Your Sprinkler System

1. Rain Sensors- If you don't already have a [rain sensor](#), these are devices that will automatically shut off watering when rainfall reaches a certain point such as 1/8" or 1/4". They are an easy way to manage watering during the rainy season without running to shut off your controller.

2. High Efficiency Irrigation- Converting existing planting beds from spray heads to drip irrigation can result in major water savings. Take this example, a water audit we performed for a client with a planting bed with 15 spray heads:

-Existing: 15 spray heads, average output per head 2.5 gallons per minute each

-Proposed: Replace with 45 drip emitters, average output per emitter .016 gallons per minute each

-Monthly Estimated Savings: Assume watering 3 times per week for 10 minutes (30 minutes per week, 130 minutes per month)

Existing sprinkler consumption: 4,875 gallons

New drip consumption: 97.5 gallons

While this is a simplified example, (the drip system may require a longer watering time per week) it goes to show how you can improve your watering efficiency dramatically by switching to a drip system with lower evaporation, lower output, and lower waste.

3. Next Generation sprayheads- For areas where drip irrigation isn't a good fit, there is an array of new higher efficiency lower output sprinkler spray heads and rotors that are up to 50% more efficient than older models.

### **Xeriscape**

Reducing your water consumption by eliminating high water use plants and lawns is an extremely effective way to curb water use. There are a variety of alternative lawn materials, and drought friendly plants that can help accomplish this. In addition to bold measures like tearing out your lawn, simple steps like adding bark or gravel mulch can help reduce evaporation and make the water that is applied to plants more effective. Read here our articles on [alternative lawns](#), [synthetic lawns](#), and view [MMWD's Water Wise Plant List](#).

Making these changes frequently require some effort and cost. But the work is rewarded by a more environmentally friendly garden, one that can better survive a drought. Given current weather patterns and strains on the water supply, making these changes now can better prepare your garden and home for water restrictions in the future.