



CLEAN WATER IS UP TO YOU

By Carol Hillestad for the Brodhead Watershed Association

Become a Water-Miser Gardener

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It's a hot afternoon in early summer. You're standing with the hose angled to cover as much of the garden as you can, spraying back and forth, back and forth. The plants are dripping, and chances are you are, too. You're bored to tears and wondering whether it's worth the trouble.

News flash — It's definitely not worth the trouble!

Most of the water you're using is evaporating before it even hits the ground. Even if you stand there sweating for an hour or more, it's a complete waste of time — you need the water to get to the roots of those little seedlings, instead of weighing down the foliage, leading to rot.

Successful vegetable and flower gardeners have six strategies that save you time, energy and water.



One. Invest in a rain gauge. It's the least expensive garden tool, and one of the most important. Your garden needs one to two inches of water a week in summer — and the gauge tells you how much, if any, you need to supplement what falls naturally.

Two. When you lay out your garden in spring, lay out a soaker hose, too. When watering is needed, connect to a water source and set a timer for 30 minutes. Check to make sure the water has penetrated deeply. And you're done. You'll get much more water to the root zone, with almost no evaporation or waste. And you'll have hours of free time, too. If you must hand-water with a hose, do your watering early or late in the day when it's cooler, and don't just sprinkle: always water deep.

Three, four, and five. Mulch, mulch, mulch. Every year add to your garden an inch of compost. It can be just about anything organic, from your homemade compost, to chopped up leaves or straw or newspapers, grass clippings, and composted manure. Mulch keeps the soil cool and slows evaporation. Over the growing season the mulch will settle into the soil and give you a head start on richer soil for next season.

Six. Turn off the sprinkler system. They waste enormous amounts of water through evaporation. They also encourage shallow roots, weakening lawns and other plantings.

Now that you're on a roll, consider setting up a rain barrel to collect the run-off from your roof. It's free, untreated, pure water. Connect that to your soaker hose, and you are officially a water-miser gardener!

Bonus tip: consider mixing vegetable crops in with your annual flowers. Lettuce, romaine, spinach, parsley, basil, even climbing beans are pretty plants as well as delicious food.

Check out Brodhead Watershed Association's native plant sale <https://shop.brodheadwatershed.org/>
Find lots of info on water-wise gardening here at <https://ansp.org/get-involved/small-actions-spark-bigchanges/>

For tips on building healthy soil go to <https://www.gardeners.com/how-to/building-healthysoil/5060.html>

For humans, fish, and every living thing, Brodhead Watershed Association protects water quality and quantity throughout our area. Get involved! Become a member today. <https://www.brodheadwatershed.org>