# Water Ways

May 20, 2013 *Posted by* ***admin*** *on* ***May 20, 2013*** *in* ***Home & Garden, Women*** | ***8 comments***

**Gaga For Gardening, *By Barb Batallion***

The dog days of summer are right around the corner. You know, the long hot patch when vibrant green foliage can droop and brown around the edges. Mercury rises and precipitation levels fall. Survival of beloved ornamentals may depend upon availability of water and how well their owners prepare.

Rain levels and imposition of watering restrictions lie beyond our control, but we all know the arrival of summer's heat is inevitable. Most of us prefer to limit the time we must spend watering. Planning ahead is the best water-reduction technique. And it's not too late to get your garden heat proofed while the weather is still temperate.

Heavy mulching during the spring reduces the amount of water plants need,

because it shades roots from the sun. When roots dry out plants can become damaged or die, so keeping them moist is one of summer's greatest challenges. In addition to keeping the roots cooler, mulch-induced shade slows evaporation.

I use a mixture of two types of mulch. Small particulate mulch, (such as Natures Helper or home-made compost) covers the ground around my plants out to the drip line. The drip line is the plant's perimeter—the area from the base of the plant to the outer edge of the leaves. Free mulch (like wood chips from fallen trees or limbs) covers the ground from the drip line on. Since its pieces are large, it decomposes more slowly, sometimes using the slow-release fertilizer spread before mulching to help it decay. Its decomposition increases heat, making it unsuitable for spreading within the drip line.

I'm motivated to curtail watering by shortages and high pricing. Many creative ways to accomplish this exist. More water-dependent plants, like hydrangeas and showy flowers, can be grouped together in smaller numbers for visual impact and more efficient watering. If leaves could drink, sprinklers or in-ground watering systems would be efficient means of maintaining plants vitality. Since only roots can "drink," such systems waste a good deal of water.

Instead of flipping the switch, try watering the old fashioned way–on a micro level. Stand next to the plant with a running hose and count to 15, 30 or even 60 for the largest plants as you water from base to drip line. Any more water dropped at one time will tend to puddle and stream away from the target. Then move on to the next plant and water it the same way. This method gets the water where it needs to go. As you move from the first plant to the last, water seeps into the ground to the roots. Once you've made the entire circuit of ornamentals, start again and "micro-water" a second time. Water early in the morning or late in the evening to minimize evaporation and protect yourself from the sun's hottest rays.

Cutting down on the number of potted plants decorating the yard reduces your water bill and energy expenditure. Garden decorations and even faux plants are eye-catching alternatives for pot lovers. Hardscaping with decorative retaining walls, stone paths, furniture, statuary and colorful garden accents provides focal points that require no water.

Xeriscaping (from the Greek word xeros meaning dry) is a design style that minimizes water use. Drought tolerant and native plants form the backbone of such plans. Gardeners designing new spaces, or redesigning old ones should consider using this technique in at least a part of your garden. Every square foot of xeriscaping furthers conservation of a critical natural resource and our hard-earned moolah. Local extension services have lists of native plants for their areas; and neighborhood garden enthusiasts are excellent resources for identifying plants that thrive locally.

Image courtesy of Sira/ FreeDigitalPhotos.net