

Watering the Garden



It would take a blind optimist to believe that Utah won't be facing some effects of drought this summer. If you are considering a vegetable garden this summer, the best way to conserve water is to start planning your garden now.

The best way to conserve water is to make a map of your garden and be open to changes, says Bill Varga, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. We tend to follow gardening traditions that are more suitable for farms than home vegetable gardens.

For instance, Varga says most people tend to plant rows that are wide enough to drive a tractor through. One of the best ways to save water is to plant as close together as the particular plant instructions allow. You can plant in circles, squares, triangles, whatever, as long as you leave enough room to reach the weeds.

The next thing you can do is work extra organic matter into the soil. Most Utah soil is low in organic matter and it will help hold in moisture, he says.

"Organic matter" can be just about any type of compost or fertilizer, Varga says. You probably want to avoid too much barnyard manure because it may carry lots of weed seeds with it. These will be counterproductive to your garden. If you have it available, homemade compost made of rotted plant matter is one of the best things you can add to your garden soil. If not, this is a good time to start a compost pile.

He says to apply about one inch of organic matter on top and work it into the soil. You will probably need to add about one and one half pounds of nitrogen per 100 square feet of garden to help break down the organic matter.

When it comes time to water, Varga says one of the biggest mistakes people make is watering everything in the yard on the same schedule. Shrubs and plants such as raspberries often get watered right along with the vegetables even though they don't need nearly as much

water. Make an effort in your planning to separate the plants that are big water users from those that need it less frequently.

In general, he suggests trying to be more thoughtful about water use. We have become used to relatively cheap water and as a result probably built bigger gardens than we need.

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