

# Surrey garden aims to make you water wise

## Even at the height of our drought, plants are fine with no watering

BY BETHANY LINDSAY, VANCOUVER SUN JULY 29, 2015

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Gardener Lindsey Friesen is responsible for the Surrey WaterWise demonstration garden in Surrey, B.C. looking so great.

**Photograph by:** Steve Bosch, PNG

Has this summer's drought got you interested in learning how to make your garden more water-efficient? Look no further than the WaterWise Demonstration Garden at Surrey City Hall.

Even in a Level 4 drought, it's doing just fine.

"It has all the different plants and shrub materials that do well in drought," said Owen Croy, Surrey's manager of parks. "We don't use any water in the garden and stuff is thriving there."

The garden was created in 2001 to show the public how to preserve rainwater in the soil and work with drought-tolerant species. It features ornamental grasses, perennial ground cover like thyme and rosemary, and woody shrubs.

"Some of the keys are good-quality deep soils, so plants can get really well-rooted, using mulch in the beds so you can slow down the evaporation of water from the soils, and having appropriate spacing for the plants," Croy said.

Vancouver's engineering department also uses relatively drought-resistant species along city streets and medians; even in wet years, these are harsh environments.

"If they can survive in these areas, there is a strong likelihood that they will survive in someone's garden," city spokesman Jag Sandhu said in an email.

A list of recommended plants for traffic circles is available on Vancouver's website at [bit.ly/1h3Uzgu](http://bit.ly/1h3Uzgu).

Learning to garden this way will be increasingly important in the years to come, according to Matt Kilburn of Take Root Gardens in Vancouver.

"The new norm is now drought in the summer, but we get more water than we actually need come the winter. Finding something that can deal with both of those situations is key," he said.

The first step is to draw up a detailed diagram of the yard, showing slopes, shaded areas and sunny areas. That helps determine which plants should go where, and which spots should receive the most water.

Once that's out of the way, it's time to start putting together a drought-ready yard.

First, it's time to turf the turf.

"Lawn is by far the biggest draw as far as water goes," Kilburn said.

He suggests determining exactly how much lawn you want to keep, then replacing the rest with drought-resistant plants or "hardscaping" features like rock gardens and flagstone patios.

Sloped areas are great candidates for xeriscaping.

"Whenever there is turf on a slope, that is not a particularly great way of retaining water. There is a lot of runoff," Kilburn said.

Sunny and south-facing areas that lose water through evaporation are also good locations for hardy plants.

Another thing to consider is a more-efficient watering system. If you're starting from scratch with a new garden, **drip irrigation can be a good option — and it isn't banned under Metro Vancouver's Stage 3 watering restrictions.**

"Wherever possible, having drip irrigation versus surface irrigation means that the water penetrates right into the roots. It's much more efficient," Kilburn said.

For existing gardens, something as simple as using mulch in flowerbeds can slow down evaporation, and even gravel will work for hardy plants like lavender.

And if you simply can't stand the idea of losing your lawn, there are "eco turf" alternative grasses that are better adapted to Vancouver's climate.

"Once established, they tend to take care of themselves. They look a bit different; they tend to grow a bit longer," Kilburn said. "There are options ... if it's really a question of trying to have less of a footprint on water usage."

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