

Just a Drop of Water

By now you have received your notice from SNWA or seen their somewhat silly commercials reminding us to only water our landscapes three days a week. This is an effort to conserve our most precious resource...water. More than 50% of water used is for the landscape. Not only is it important to conserve our limited water supply, but the health of the plants is also at stake.



When I first moved to Southern Nevada 27 years ago there were a lot of very thirsty plant types dominating our landscapes. Landscape irrigation was mainly pop-up spray heads that basically flooded the area. No one really cared how much water was put down as long as the ground was always wet and the water loving plants were green. The first real desert landscape that I designed was in 1989 and the contractor had a hard time finding the plant material because no one grew desert plants. Today our landscape has shifted dramatically to more of a drought tolerant plant palette. Irrigation systems have changed dramatically also. Drip irrigation is used with most drought tolerant plants. We have even designed a few projects with native plants that require no supplemental water once established.

There are many "Smart" irrigation controllers on the market that can control the water applied by constantly monitoring temperature, humidity, rainfall, wind, solar radiation and evapotranspiration. Ten years ago these controllers were so pricey that only large projects could even think of using them. However, like all electronic equipment, the price keeps coming down. Now, even a typical residence can have some sort of "Smart" control for the irrigation. The return on investment can be measured in months. When I installed one on my yard several years ago, my water bill went down almost 20% compared to the previous year the very first month... and I thought I was controlling the water to my landscape very carefully.

If you can, get a "Smart" controller for your landscape. It will be well worth the small investment. Your plants will be happier also because they won't be put through cycles of under watering then over watering. If you can't get a new controller now, at least follow the SNWA water guidelines and adjust your controllers accordingly. If each person in Southern Nevada saved only one gallon of water a day, we would have an extra two million gallons of water to add to the store every day.

"Water is the driving force of all nature."
— Leonardo da Vinci

FAVORITE FLORA:

DALEA CAPITATA 'SIERRA GOLD' - SIERRA GOLD DALEA



September's favorite flora is a great groundcover that can be found in landscapes throughout Las Vegas and the southwest. Sierra Gold Dalea (*Dalea capitata* 'Sierra Gold') is a very hardy plant that is perfect for the toughest locations in a landscape. This native of Mexico enjoys full sun locations but can also tolerate some shade. Reflected heat, roadway and parking lot locations will not harm this Dalea. Growing about 8 inches tall with a 3 foot spread, Sierra Gold Dalea has a soft look with tiny bright green leaves. This semi-deciduous groundcover only loses its leaves during the coldest Las Vegas winters, making it a great option to add some color to a winter landscape. This plant usually has no fragrance, but

when the leaves are crushed it will let off a lemon scent. Small, yellow flowers appear both in the spring and fall and can add a touch of color to an otherwise continuous sea of green.

Sierra Gold Dalea will look great in mass plantings in parking islands and street medians but don't let this deter you from placing it in smaller residential sized landscapes. It is a great substitute for lantana if you are looking for something that will not freeze back to the ground in the winter. This groundcover can be planted around cacti and other succulents in desert landscapes, as a foundation plant in rock gardens, or as an excellent driveway border. To keep this plant looking its best prune it back 30%-50% to maintain dense growth.

Photo of the Month

Colorful Cliffs
Red Rock Canyon NCA, NV
Nicolette Fisk

