

Compost and Mulch for Water Wise Gardening

Nearly half of California is in an exceptional drought, including Alameda County, which is seeing its 10th driest year on record. Outdoor landscapes can be some of the biggest water users at our homes, but simple and cost-effective approaches are available to help reduce outdoor water use and keep your garden healthy.

Compost is a soil amendment that improves water retention and improves soil health by encouraging microbial activity. It helps grow vigorous and healthy plants while also increasing the ability of plants and soil to pull carbon out of the atmosphere and sequester it deep in the soil. You can make your own compost at home, or check out the “marketplace” at www.LawntoGarden.org for sources of locally produced compost.

Recycled content mulch – made from tree trimmings or pallet lumber – helps retain moisture for your plants and greatly reduces weeds, especially if you sheet mulch with a layer of cardboard and compost. A 2-3 inch layer of coarse mulch applied around perennials and shrubs can last at least a year. You can purchase in bulk or get a free load from a local tree trimmer and share with neighbors.

Growing vegetables at home is still encouraged during the drought and offers many environmental benefits such as reducing the fossil fuel used for transportation, minimizing pesticide use, and reducing food waste by just harvesting what you need. Just be sure to check drip irrigation systems for leaks, or water deeply by hand in the morning to maximize water intake by plants and minimize evaporation.

Check out the [gardening pages](#) on the StopWaste website (www.StopWaste.org/gardening) for extensive resources on how to make and use compost and workshop and plant sale listings. Visit www.LawntoGarden.org for information on water agency rebates.



Using compost and mulch in the garden can help stretch our limited water supplies. Compost helps retain soil moisture, and mulch keeps soil cool and limits evaporation.



Applying compost is an easy way feed the soil with nutrients that will help plants thrive.