

## Pots

Porous terracotta pots are not the best at retaining water. Glazed or plastic pots are better. Gather pots together in hot weather to create mutual shading of plants.

Think carefully about whether you should grow plants, and especially trees, in pots at all. They require a lot more watering than those in the ground as they cannot develop deep root systems.



## Rain Gardens

Rain gardens are planted where runoff from hard surfaces collects or can be fed by a pipe from roof guttering. The rain is temporarily stored by the garden during heavy showers, so the plants should be able to withstand temporary waterlogging. Rain gardens are low maintenance once established, and can reduce erosion and local flooding. They mimic natural drainage by slowing the flow of rainwater entering sewer networks, and filtering out pollution before it enters rivers. More information can be found on the RHS website.

## Rain Garden Planters

A rain garden planter is a small rain garden positioned under a roof downpipe. Excess water exits via a leaky pipe at the bottom of the planter connected to a drain. For more information, go to the Slow the Flow website.

Produced by the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership  
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# Water-wise Gardening



East Kent is one of the driest parts of England and most households will want to water their gardens throughout the summer months. However, this causes water stress on local rivers. Groundwater currently supplies 80% of the Stour Catchment's domestic water but this same water also feeds our rivers. Pressure on groundwater is set to increase, with the population in the South East growing rapidly.



In order to meet the needs of domestic supply but also protect our rivers we need to use water wisely. There are many things we can do to become more water efficient, particularly in the garden.

## Plant wisely

The first step is finding out what soil type you have. This will allow you to pick plants which will thrive in those conditions. Have you got heavy clay or free-draining chalky soil?

There are many flowering plants which require less water but are also great for bees, such as lavender (pictured), verbena, buddleia, foxgloves, mullein and cat mint. Succulents are a great option for planters or rockeries as many are drought resistant. Sedums also require little water. Many native wild flowers require less frequent watering, but provide wildlife with nectar, and look fantastic!



Martin Fehsemer / CC BY SA

### **When and how to water**

Established perennials, trees and shrubs shouldn't need much watering as a rule. Although they may not look at their best during drought, they will put down deeper roots and grow stronger in the long term. For newly planted shrubs and trees, a pipe or plastic bottle with the base cut off can be inserted into the soil next to the base; water is then poured down directly to the roots.



When you need to, water well every few days, to encourage deep rooting, rather than a light watering every day. Water either early morning or in the evenings when there is a lower rate of evaporation. During periods of drought, try not to disturb the topsoil as it may be protecting moisture in the soil below.

Use a watering can rather than a hose. They allow for small portions of water to be applied rather than the continuous flow of a hose, reducing wastage. Remove the rose and point the spout at the base of the plant. If you can't avoid using a hose, fit a spray gun or similar attachment which can stop and start flow.

### **Mulching**

Mulches can help retain moisture in soil as well as suppressing weed growth. Biodegradable mulches also release nutrients and improve structure. Apply in late spring and autumn when the soil is moist and warm.



Good biodegradable mulches include leaf mould, garden compost, wood chippings, seaweed and well-rotted manure. Refresh the layer when the material has rotted down fully. Non-biodegradable mulches such as slate or shingle will also help retain moisture.

### **Fruit and Veg**

Seedlings require watering as they have small roots. Once a plant is established it should need less watering, although this will depend on what you are growing. When planting out large plants like courgettes, squashes and cucumbers make a small ridge around the plant to help to keep the water close to the roots. For spreading plants such as cucumber and pumpkin, where it is difficult to spot the main stem once grown, place a cane at the planting stage so you know where to water.

### **Water Butts**

Using drinking water to water the garden is far from ideal, so use water from butts if you have them. And if you haven't got a water butt, get one now! Southern Water is offering discounts – go to their website and click on 'help and advice'. Ultimately a water butt has limited capacity, but any water collected is better than none and any container under a downpipe will help.



### **Grey Water**

'Grey water' is water from baths, showers and washing up. It can be siphoned off or collected and used to water the garden. Many household soaps and detergents are harmless to plants but those containing bleach, disinfectant, dishwasher salt or strong cleaners should not be used. Grey water shouldn't be used on fruit and veg or for topping up ponds.

### **Lawns don't need watering!**

Don't worry if your lawn turns yellow/brown in the summer, it isn't dying and as soon as it rains it will bounce back again. The exception is a newly laid lawn, which will need watering in its first summer. Never use a lawn sprinkler – they are extremely wasteful! You can also protect grass from drought by reducing the number of mowings and increasing the mow height - taller grass creates shade.