

Efficient water use – everyone’s responsibility

Earth First

By Peter West, ECCO

In recent years we have heard a great deal about the condition of the Murray-Darling basin and its struggling rivers. What we haven’t heard much about, is the role each local community can play in conserving water to protect environmental values and to support down-stream users, including farmers and rural communities all the way to South Australia.

Orange is situated in headwaters of the Macquarie catchment, and our local creeks and rivers are also under serious stress. Low inflows and prolonged drought have reduced many to a trickle, and others to a series of pools.

Oranges water storage dams are rapidly approaching the 20% level (a proportion of which is largely unsuitable for drinking), and unprecedented Level 5a water restrictions have now been put in place.

With local rainfall predictions looking unfavourable, and less and less water in our local rivers (including the Macquarie River), Orange needs a long-term solution to its water crisis, not another pipeline dream. The focus should be on using available water more efficiently, investing in water-efficient technology and infrastructure, and re-using and recycling water (including wastewater) wherever we can.

Whatever approach we take, one thing is clear – everyone must take ownership of the current water problem, and help with its solution. Whether at home, work, school, or on holidays from elsewhere – everyone in Orange has a role to play in conserving water. And while our immediate concern may be securing water for our needs, spare a thought for all the downstream users, and their needs.

Over the coming weeks, the Earth First column will be dedicated to the topic of sustainable water use. It will raise important issues for public discussion, and highlight some of the challenges of regional water management. It will also provide a series of simple ways in which everyone can make a difference at home, work and school.

As level 5a water restrictions now limit watering outside the home to buckets and watering cans between the hours of 6pm and 7pm on Sundays only, this week’s Earth First focus is sustainable water use in the garden.

Helpful tips:

- When planting new plants, add water crystals and wetting agent to the soil

- Group plants with similar water requirements, and in suitable areas off the garden where they are likely to obtain their moisture needs from rainfall and runoff alone
- When bucketing water, pour water through any mulch or leaves to the plants roots
- Mulch all garden beds and around each plant well. Mulch can be shredded newspaper, straw, compost, leaves, manure, lucerne hay, sugarcane mulch, pea straw, or woodchips. This may need to be topped up periodically as it breaks down.
- Apply mulch after rainfall, when the soil is moist, or leave gaps in the mulch for rain to penetrate (this weekend is ideal)
- Monitor the soil moisture level using a garden fork.
- Watch your plants carefully, if they don't need water, don't waste it
- Cut your lawn long, short grass dries off much faster
- Use lawn clippings for garden mulch or compost it with other garden refuse
- Decrease your lawn area by planting native garden beds, reducing long-term water needs and mowing time
- Wash fruit and vegies over a bowl and use that water on pot plants
- Check for leaking outside taps, and repair any worn washers
- Use grey-water garden safe washing detergents and bucket rinse water from your clothes washing machine onto garden plants
- Install a rebate suitable rainwater tank for your garden, laundry and bathroom water needs
- Abide by local water restrictions.

Information for this article has been provided by WaterWise NSW

FURTHER INFORMATION

For current water restrictions in Orange, see www.orange.nsw.gov.au

For further information see: www.waterwisensw.com.au, www.savewater.com.au, and www.waterforlife.com.au.

Sustainable tip for the week: Mulching gardens can keep your plants alive. However, place enough mulch to cover the soil to 5-10cm depth, but no deeper. Thick mulch can prevent rainfall from penetrating.

Green dates for the calendar:

Next weeks article – How to be water wise in your home.

Community Garden working bee – ELF building, Orange Showground. Saturday February 13.