



GREEN GARDENING

Green thumbs go for recycled water

Recycled water makes gardeners happy as they can maintain lush landscapes all year despite drought conditions.

Using Class A water for gardening is not much different to using drinking water. Regardless of which water is used, good gardeners consider the local conditions; soil type, climate and position when creating and maintaining their gardens.

Safe as houses

South East Water provides recycled water treated to Class A standards for domestic use. This means it is produced according to strict guidelines developed by the Victorian Environment Protection Authority and the Department of Human Services. It is derived from wastewater and treated to a high quality.

Recycled water **is not suitable for personal use**, however, it is safe for watering plants and vegetables. As always, vegetables should be washed with drinking water before being eaten.

Useful information for gardeners

Many golf courses and nurseries have been irrigating successfully with recycled water for as long as 30 years.

Paydirt

Soil conditions vary across the areas in which recycled water is available. Clay soils can present drainage issues, however, the soil can be improved by adding organic materials like compost and gypsum. Loam soils generally provide better drainage.

Regardless of your soil type, adding or maintaining organic matter through composting will help create healthier plants that will utilise water and nutrients efficiently. Having the correct soil pH is important. It may be worthwhile purchasing an inexpensive pH testing kit from your local nursery to help you monitor your soil. Most plants require slightly acidic soils. As recycled water generally has neutral pH, it should not have any effect.

Tip

- Apply lime to raise the pH of acidic soils where necessary.



A grain of salt

Recycled water has a salt concentration that is approximately 500 parts per million (ppm). This is low relative to the salt concentration found in most irrigation water sourced from groundwater or surface water.

Most plants thrive on recycled water. However, plants such as roses, citrus, azaleas and camellias may be sensitive to salt, in particular at seedling stage. To manage this follow the watering habits detailed in the section, 'Reaching the root of the matter'.

Plants that thrive with recycled water

Trees	Aleppo Pine, Bottlebrush, Coral Gum, Weeping Sheoak, Olive, Willow Myrtle, Yellow Gum, Swamp Mallet, Wallangara White Gum
Shrubs	Ceanothus, Crimson Spot Rock Rose, Gawler Range Wattle, Geralton Wax, Heath Banksia, Oleander, Purple Rock Rose, Rosemary, Westringia, Yeddo Hawthorn
Flowers/Perennials	Agapanthus, Carnation, Lomandra, Marigold, Mondo Grass, Nasturtium, NZ Flax, Portulace, South African Butterfly Iris, Statice
Turf	Buffalo, Green Couch, Kikuyu, Seashore Paspalum
Climbers	Bouganvillea, Honeysuckle, Maiden Hair Creeper, Ornamental Grapevine, Snake Vine
Ground covers	Creeping Boobialla, Ice Plant, Pig Face, Seaside Daisy, Salt-bush, Seaside Juniper

Extra source of nutrients

Nitrogen and phosphorous are also present in recycled water at approximately 20mg/l (milligrams per litre) and 7mg/l respectively. Most plants will thrive on this extra source of nutrients. It is expected that you will need to add extra fertiliser only to high growth plants such as vegetables. Some native seedlings may be sensitive to the phosphorus levels, in particular grevilleas, hakeas, proteas and banksias.

Expert advice

The list of plants detailed above is not exhaustive. If you observe any changes in your plants that concern you, seek expert advice from your local nursery.

Note: These nutrients are great for the garden but not for the stormwater system as they can upset waterways. Avoid letting recycled water run off into the stormwater drain by watering appropriately and make sure you wash your car on the grass.

Drought tolerant gardening

Although recycled water is not subject to Permanent Water Saving Rules* it is important to remember that it is still a precious commodity and should not be wasted. Recycled water should be used sensibly in order to protect our environment.

Tip

- Trigger nozzles are an effective method of controlling the direction and flow of water ensuring that you don't waste water.

* For more information refer to www.southeastwater.com.au

Reaching the root of the matter

Sensible watering habits are better for the garden and can save you money. Watering in the middle of the day wastes water due to evaporation. It may also cause leaf burn if the plants are salt sensitive.

Tips

- Regardless of the type of water you use, direct the water to the roots not the foliage. This way the plant receives more and the leaves are protected from leaf burn.
- Regular deep watering, ideally at night, will enhance the health of your plants and save water. While establishing your garden, water more frequently for less time and build up to one hour of deep watering once a week. Increase to twice a week during the peak of summer.
- Micro irrigation systems can deliver water efficiently to the roots in correct quantities. Drippers or sprays on short risers are also suitable.
- Apply mulch and compost to the garden bed to help retain moisture.

How to cut water consumption

1. Plan your garden – group plants with similar water needs for efficient watering.
2. Reduce lawn size as grassy areas are water greedy. Drought resistant grasses are commercially available.
3. Use Australian plant species as they flourish on little water.

Important messages

- Recycled water must be utilized for permitted uses only. (Refer to the South East Water information sheet 'Home and Hosed').
- Recycled water taps, pipes and meters are purple to ensure that plumbers and residents do not confuse drinking and recycled water fittings. Their colour must not be changed. Taps are signed – "Recycled water, do not drink".
- Take care not to over fertilise or over water.

Horticultural advice provided by Burnley Agricultural College.

Recycled water is:

- Waste water treated to a very high standard (Class A)
- Suitable for flushing toilets and outdoor use
- Providing a sustainable future for Victoria

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