

## **Best Practices/Restoration Project Reports: Outdoor Water Efficiency Campaign**

### **Description**

The outdoor lawn watering advertising and information campaign focuses on outdoor wise water management practices. Tools include a radio campaign aimed at homeowners, pilot project involving 1000 participants in planting a water wise garden, information workshops and a dedicated web site to outdoor wise watering tips. This annual campaign – now in its 6<sup>th</sup> year -- has a budget of approximately \$250k.

### **Background**

The outdoor water efficiency campaign is in support of the City of Toronto's long-term plan to improve the reliability of Toronto's water supply while meeting the city's growing demand for water. Rather than increasing capacity expanding infrastructure at a project cost of \$220 million, Toronto Water is actively freeing up capacity within the existing system. This is being done through advertising campaigns, social marketing initiatives (such as workshops) and public information campaigns, such as using the web, bill inserts in water bills, etc.

*The multi-prong strategy is aimed at:*

- Behaviour modification by shifting residential water usage to non-peak hours ( 7 to 10 a.m.) from peak hours (6 to 9 p.m.) to reduce pressure off the system. Messaging was that over watering and watering late at night could lead to lawn disease.
- Reducing outdoor water usage by educating residents on the benefits of xeriscaping (water-wise) gardens...gardens that are low maintenance, reduce water use and water bills, and still contribute to the overall aesthetics of the property and neighbourhood. The City offers a free landscape audit to educate homeowners on how to be water wise and to encourage them to consider water wise gardens as legitimate alternatives.
- Reducing outdoor water usage by providing residents, upon request, rain gauges. This tool helped promote a secondary message that all a healthy lawn needs is 1" of rain a week. Rain gauge was supported by an information card on how to use the rain gauge and why.
- Raising awareness of the city's need to meet long-term demands for water while rehabilitating an aging infrastructure
- Educating homeowners on the options, tools and flowers available to bring a successful water wise garden.

*Barriers include:*

- Reconciling residents to the need for reducing water usage despite the fact the city is situated by a large body of water: Lake Ontario
- Promoting water-wise gardens as being equally aesthetically pleasing as standard, water hungry gardens

- Tackling the notion that watering is part of an after work ritual which includes BBQing, mowing the lawn and then relaxing with a tall, cool drink.

### **Results**

- From 1999 to 2004, water usage has consistently decreased – from 547 million litres to 522 million litres in 2004. Results, to date, indicate this pattern continues.
- To date water usage patterns have shifted to non-peak from peak hours by 7.1% .
- Our 2005 target was to get 1000 people signed up for free landscape audits. This goal was achieved by end of August 2005.
- More than 50K readers had access to a watering guide/insert were prepared for the Canadian magazines House & Home and Home & Garden.

### **Pictures**

See attached

### **Contacts**

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# · simple tips ·

## for a Healthy Lawn and Garden

**Summer Watering** Watch the weather, rain is free! If you choose to water, a healthy lawn requires 25 mm (1 inch) of water per week. This includes rainfall. Avoid frequent light sprinkling to prevent weeds, disease and a lawn with shallow roots.

**Garden Watering** Apply water directly to the plant rootzone. Hand watering is best, or use a soaker hose, to save water, reduce maintenance and increase your free time.

**When to Water** Early in the morning is the best time to water as less water is lost to evaporation. Avoid evening watering because your lawn or garden stays wet all night, which can cause plant disease. Also, avoid watering on hot, sunny or windy days to reduce extreme water loss to evaporation.

**Mulch** Spread mulch— such as bark, shredded wood or leaves — in garden beds and around trees. Mulch retains moisture and controls weeds.

**Mowing** Mow your lawn only when needed. Your grass should be 7.5 cm (3 inches) to prevent drying and to choke out weeds.

**For more information, please call (416) 397-LAWN (5296)  
or visit [www.toronto.ca/water](http://www.toronto.ca/water)**

**Waterwise tip:**  
using an aerator  
increases water  
absorption



**Lawn mower:**  
environmentally  
friendly



**Water wise plant:**  
Day Lily

