



RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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RRWA Environmental Column – October 2010

Protecting Our Watershed During the Fall Months

Falling leaves, changing landscapes, periodic rainfall, and shorter days – just a few of the many things we associate with the fall season. Unfortunately, this time of the year can also mean over irrigation, water waste and pollution of our local creeks and the Russian River. As we enter into the fall months and the rainy season approaches, it is important to remember that the water needs of landscape plants change, and that anything that winds up on the sidewalk or street, including water from over-irrigation, can eventually find its way into our local waterways.

Even when the temperature is hot, the shorter days of fall mean fewer hours of sunlight, which means our garden plants need less water. In an average year in Sonoma and Mendocino counties, plants need the most water in July. By October, plants need approximately 40% of the water that they needed during the month of July. It is important to adjust your irrigation controller regularly and to reduce the irrigation run times to avoid over watering this time of year. Some other simple ways to reduce your irrigation use and prevent over watering your plants include using repeat start times and short run times for each irrigation station to allow more water to soak into the ground and reduce runoff, and checking and adjusting your irrigation sprinklers and drip emitters while they are running to make sure they are watering the intended target.

Fall is a great time to consider making changes to your landscape, such as installing new low-water use plants, tuning up your irrigation system, installing a rainwater harvesting system, or upgrading to a SMART irrigation controller which automatically adjusts the amount of time your irrigation system runs based on weather conditions. Many water utilities offer technical advice and rebates that will assist you in making changes that will reduce your outdoor water use all year. Call your local water utility or check their web site to find out what rebates they offer and how they may be able to assist you.

Fall is also the beginning of the rainy season which means paying extra attention to outdoor “housekeeping.” Storm water can carry things such as fallen leaves, litter, fertilizers and pesticides from lawns or gardens, and other pollutants into storm drains. Anything that flows into a storm drain enters our local creeks, streams and rivers without any treatment. These pollutants can have a harmful effect on fish and wildlife that live in local waterways. A few simple ways you can prepare for the rainy season include raking up and recycling fallen leaves; picking up and disposing of litter around your yard; correctly covering and storing paints, chemicals, cleaning agents, and other potential pollutants that are stored in areas affected by weather conditions; sweeping up dirt and other debris from sidewalks and driveways; preventing leaks and promptly cleaning up spills when they occur; and reducing irrigation water use to prevent runoff.

For additional information on ways to reduce stormwater pollution in Russian River watershed, visit the Russian River Watershed Association’s Stormwater web page at: www.rrwatershed.org/stormwater.html

By improving your irrigation efficiency, adjusting your watering based on the needs of plants, properly disposing of litter, leaves, dirt and other materials, and preparing for the rainy season, you can save water and help protect our local creeks and the Russian River.

This article was authored by Jennifer Burke, Senior Water Resources Planner, with the City of Santa Rosa on behalf of the Russian River Watershed Association. RRWA is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.