

# Saving Water

**Water economy** strategies and methods for coping with drought and saving money on water bills fall into 3 main categories:

1. Water storage and irrigation,
2. Soil preparation and management and choice of plants.
3. Growing strategies.

## **Water storage and irrigation strategies**

Store water for dry spells: collect rainwater from roofs in water butts (this also saves fetching and carrying the extra distance from a trough). Water thoroughly every 7 – 10 days rather than little and often. Light watering can be counter-productive: it may not reach the depth at which most roots are found, and encourages surface roots which are most at risk of drying out. Water in the cool of the evening or early morning. Evaporation rates are much reduced. Root Watering: sink 5 – 8 cm pipes or plastic drink bottle with the bottoms cut off in the soil alongside plants that might need water e.g. strawberries grown on black plastic raised mounds, e.g. between climbing French beans. Water planting holes while planting plantlets and seed trenches before sowing seeds in order to reduce evaporation rates.

**Soil Management:** The amount of water a soil can hold depends on its constituents and structure. Clay soils can typically hold around 105mm of rainfall in the top 60 cm. It is possible both to increase a soil's water-holding capacity and slow the rate of water loss by evaporation. Dig in organic matter: this can increase moisture-holding capacity by the equivalent of up to 50 mm of rainfall in the first year after application – enough to supply plants for around 20 days. Mulch heavily: a 7 cm layer of chipped bark, green waste or garden compost spread onto moist soil reduces evaporation and discourages weeds. Remove weeds promptly as they appear as they suck water out of the soil. Stop digging or cultivating soil by late March if possible, and hoe only to remove weeds, as both increase soil evaporation. This obviously means advance preparation and clearly doesn't apply to preparing the ground for follow on crops. Don't walk on wet., heavy soils in winter: it can cause compaction, damaging the structure and lowering the moisture holding capacity.

**Growing Strategies** Delay planting perennials, eg fruit bushes, until autumn when water is more available: planted early they will need irrigation all summer. Choose more drought-tolerant varieties if available. Carrots, parsnips and cabbages can get by on less water than salad leaves, tomatoes, courgettes, cauliflowers and peas. Pumpkins and sweetcorn have the lowest requirements for irrigation.

**Hosepipes** The use of hosepipes is forbidden except under exceptional circumstances - See Tenancy Agreement, Second Schedule clause 21.