![Barwon Water]

Living Laboratory - Waterwise Garden Summary

In 2022, Barwon Water launched the Birregurra Living Laboratory project as part of the Birregurra Sustainable Communities – Water Program. The second Living Laboratory project was all about gardens and outdoor water use. Water usage in Birregurra almost triples during summer as a result of high outdoor water use.

Up to 40% of household water in Australia is used outdoors, but for some households this figure may be much higher. Large gardens, pools and dry climates can contribute to high outdoor water use.

The Garden Living Laboratory supported Birregurra residents to adopt sustainable water use behaviours in their gardens. Barwon Water engaged a water efficient garden / irrigation specialist to carry out free garden visits providing advice to residents on water efficient gardening practices such as plant zoning, plant choice, soil health, mulch and watering requirements (when to water and how much to water).

Recommendations were provided to residents to improve garden watering and efficiency, watering systems were checked for leaks and quick fixes, adjustments and upgrades to existing garden watering set-ups were undertaken.

Waterwise Garden Tips

While there were many water efficient garden practices observed in Birregurra, opportunities for further improvements were identified. The most common tips provided included:

- Plant choice - select low water using plant species, preferably native plants
- Plant zoning – plant similar water using plant species together to avoid overwatering
- Mulching - reduces evaporation from soil by up to 70% as well as suppressing weeds and keeping soil cool
- WettaSoil – improves water penetration which means less watering
- Tecline – drip irrigation system for garden beds which is a very water efficient alternative to sprinkler systems
- If you are time poor or forget to turn off the sprinkler – tap timers are an excellent device and you can program the timer to water before 10am and after 6pm
- Rainwater tanks – if toilets are not connected to your tank, get the most out of them by using the rainwater in your garden
- Don't overwater – look for plant stress during hot / dry periods and then water
- Check watering / irrigation systems every year for leaks

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Case Study

Gayle and her husband are keen gardeners who own a very large property in Birregurra.

An irrigation system is used to water high value garden beds and hand watering is required in some areas of the garden.

The water efficient garden specialist found that their current garden watering practices were relatively efficient, however, advice and tips were provided to help Gayle increase water efficiency as well as keep the garden a lovely space she enjoys.

Gayle and her husband installed shrubbler irrigation (stream drippers / mini sprinklers capable of delivering water at a high flow rate directly to the roots), which is recognised as being relatively water efficient but it can be difficult to determine flow rates.

A more water efficient alternative 'tecline' (drip line irrigation system tube used to supply precise amounts of water to lawn and garden areas) was suggested, along with use of an existing rainwater tank to irrigate high value garden beds.

Advice was provided on the importance of using water storing granules (WettaSoil), maintaining turf and established trees, and the best time / duration to water to keep these maintained to encourage drought hardiness. It was suggested that they reduce the number of planter pots which required a high volume of water and being selective about plant choice in the future.

Gayle said that it's a very encouraging sign from Barwon Water to be shown an efficient and effective watering system such as tecline, that not only saves time and labour (by dragging hoses around) but most importantly saving water.

> *The water storing granule product has been amazing. Great tips and ideas.*
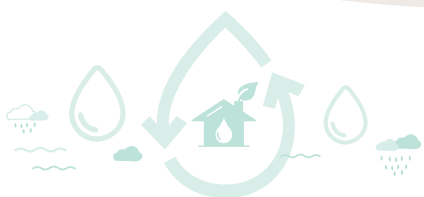
For further information

📞 1300 656 007 | ✉ info@barwonwater.vic.gov.au

www.barwonwater.vic.gov.au

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