



WATER MANAGEMENT FOR YOUR GARDEN Julie Leah

Private gardens in Britain cover an area bigger than all of the country's nature reserves combined, estimated at over 10 million acres. Individual gardens may be small, but they create important green links between urban nature reserves and the wider countryside, forming vital wildlife corridors. One critical aspect of gardening is the task of watering. Rainfall in this country is high, so we just need to learn to catch it when it falls to offset against periods of drought. This has three benefits:

- It helps to reduce flooding and run-off pollution into rivers (10 million acres is a lot of surface water)
- It provides plants with better quality water
- It saves us money as we then use less processed water (tap water), which also has its own carbon footprint.

Top tips:

1. Catch as much water as you can in water butts and old bins. I have five water butts, two of which are old wheelie bins with the lid taken off plus three other old black bins which sit next to the water butts for bailing into after heavy rainfall leaving the butt ready to be filled again.
2. Add trays of any kind under flower pots – lids from plastic tubs, old roasting tins, trays from old pet cages, chipped plates, etc. All can cost nothing and hold water under the pot so when you water it stays for longer and reduces labour and frequency of watering. Place old carpet or fleece membrane under the pot on the tray for extra water absorption.
3. Only water the soil around the plants not the whole plant or all the ground. This discourages weeds and makes slug / snail movement harder.
4. Use a mulch or similar organic matter to retain the water in your soil.
5. Avoid digging!! The less soil is turned and weeded, the more its structure will retain water and the micro-organisms we now know are needed for healthy soil.
6. Avoid the temptation to mow weekly in summer. Leaving grass a bit longer helps the soil to absorb rain, keeps the lawn healthy and helps lawn feeders like blackbirds as they can still get the worms and grubs. It also reduces flooding.
7. Encourage long verges where you can as this helps with flood prevention and creates bee-, butterfly- and moth-friendly habitats which in turn feeds the birds and the bats and pollinates our crops.