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# ASK A MASTER GARDENER

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## DRIP IRRIGATION

*By Vic Biswell, Placer County Master Gardener*

**Q** I have heard that drip irrigation is a way to save water in the garden but I know nothing about it? Is it something I can do myself?

**A** It is a water distribution method which was actually used in ancient times to efficiently deliver water to crops using buried pots with drip holes on the sides. Today drip uses plastic pipe, calibrated emitters, and micro sprays to carry a controlled flow of water, under low pressure, directly to plants and trees.

Drip irrigation has multiple uses in horticultural activities. Besides typical landscape applications, it can be used with raised beds, containers, and even window boxes. It is a major facet in sustainable and edible landscapes.

Drip systems need not to be a big mystery to install, especially if you are willing to start small, experiment with different emitters, and monitor your system output on a regular basis. This can be a creative experience for you—as well as promoting healthy plants.

A beginning drip application requires a layout plan and knowing the basic installation techniques which are found in "Drip Irrigation In the Home Landscape," UC Agriculture and Natural Resources Publication 21579. This booklet also describes troubleshooting and guidelines on how much to water. Information can also be obtained from retailers in Placer County that cater to drip enthusiasts.

You will indeed save water and money when you install this irrigation system. The drip method exceeds 90% efficiency in water delivery whereas typical sprinkler systems are 50-70 % efficient.

But drip systems do more than save water; they also enhance plant performance by eliminating weed growth because they deliver water only to the designated plant or tree. Weeds can harbor insects that you might not want in your garden and they are usually an eyesore.

These highly adaptable systems can be easily expanded to irrigate additional plants/trees, even plants in tight spaces. People with busy lifestyles can automate the system using an AC or battery powered controller.

The main disadvantage is that drip systems require regular maintenance to ensure that the emitters and micro sprays do not get clogged with water particulates. Also, use of drip technology to water lawns is limited and expensive.

However, regular monitoring of the drip system can be a big advantage to your entire garden. It puts you in the garden where you can experience all the interesting events that occur there over the season.

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