

Hello and Happy 2021!

I hope you all enjoyed a relaxing break over the holidays.

With the new year in front of us, I would like to highlight some of the various ways we can all help to conserve one of our most precious natural resources, our water. I recently enjoyed a day at the San Antonio Botanical Gardens and noticed many methods the garden uses to do their part in the conservation effort.

The most evident method that can be found in all the various beds throughout the garden is mulch. Several inches of shredded mulch are placed in all the beds. In addition to mulch reducing evaporation, it will keep the soil and plant roots warm through the coldest months of the year. This practice also helps to keep weeds at bay and makes it easier to pull those rascally weeds. As I'm sure you know, weeds are in direct competition with plants for moisture and nutrients.



strawberry plants with drip irrigation lines

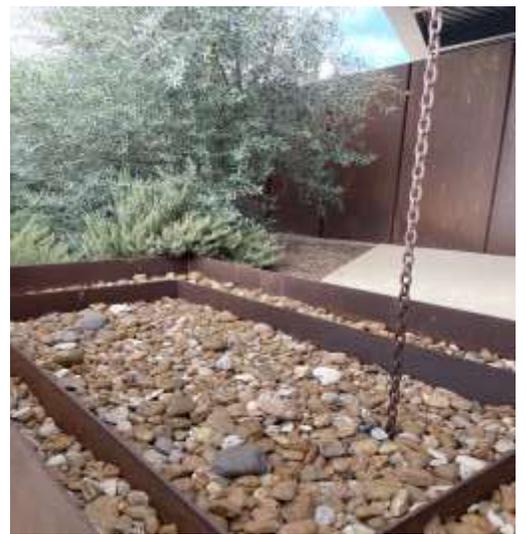
The next most common method of conservation in the garden I observed was drip irrigation. This is one of the best practices to add supplemental water to plants due to the application of water at or below the surface of the soil. This method enables easy percolation down to the plant roots rather than being sprayed on top of the plants. Evaporation is significantly reduced, so less water needs to be applied. This practice also helps to reduce diseases as a result of wet foliage.



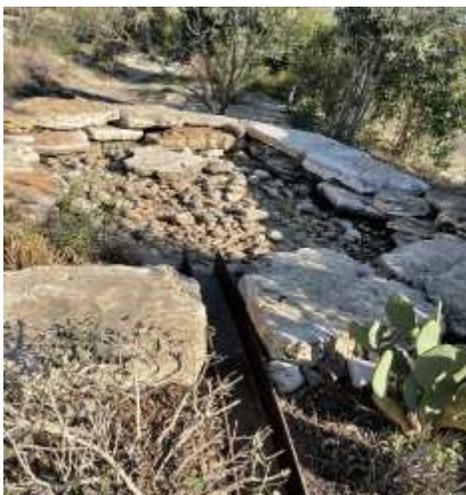
SAWS Recycled water sign

Another conservation practice is rainwater catchment. The culinary garden has several cisterns that capture water from a large roof and hold the rainwater in an underground reservoir for later use. The San Antonio Botanical

Garden uses recycled water, as most golf courses and city parks do. The garden also has water bottle refill stations at the water fountains to reduce single-use plastics.



rainwater catchment cistern and rain chain



dry pond in children's adventure garden

Conservation can also be about what we don't do. Numerous water features and fountains are turned off for the season.

In the children's adventure garden, the shallow stream so popular in the summer time is dry until temperatures once again begin to rise. Also, the garden lawns and shrubs are in reduced watering schedules. As part of winter dormancy, most plants don't require weekly irrigation applications and really only need to be watered if we don't receive any rain for about a month.

All of these practices can be adopted in our own landscapes to a smaller extent. Adding a rain barrel to capture rain, converting even one garden bed to drip irrigation, and of course, turning off the irrigation system for the winter will all add up to water savings. This has the added benefit of saving us money, which is always a bonus. I hope you enjoyed this article and learned something. I invite you to consider adopting some or all of these practices as well as visiting the San Antonio Botanical Gardens to see these methods in use.

As always, more information on these topics can be found in the Bexar County Master Gardener's Gardening Library, <https://bexarmg.org/may-we-help/gardening-information-library/> as well as the SAWS Conservation website, <https://www.gardenstylesanantonio.com/>.

All photos courtesy of Anna Vogler

Conservationally Yours,

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