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Better Plants. Better Advice. Better Results.

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## IF-3 What is Drought Tolerant?

### Key Points

- Drought tolerant does not mean “native” and native doesn’t always mean low water use.
- Low water or drought tolerant plants need water to get established.
- Many cultural factors (soil conditioning, mulches, weed control, etc.) allow drought tolerant plants to thrive.

### What is Drought Tolerant?

Frequently the term “drought tolerant” is thought of as being “dry or desert-like,” but this is an inaccurate description. Plants that are drought tolerant are just that – tolerant of drought conditions. They need not be limited to cactus varieties or other dry climate plants; instead they include a wide selection of lush, green plants that are attractive in any landscape.

Once established, these plants are able to withstand long periods of dryness without deterioration, going several weeks, or in some cases an entire season, between deep watering. Such plants reduce the impact on limited water supplies.

### Water Requirements

When planting drought tolerant species of trees and shrubs, it is necessary to water frequently and deeply for one or two seasons. Once the plant has become established, it can thrive on far less water than we are accustomed to providing. If plants are watered frequently, such as during lawn watering, they become shallow rooted and therefore dependent upon frequent irrigation. On the other hand, less frequent watering will promote deep rooting which makes for a healthier plant which also becomes established more quickly.

Trees, shrubs and plants also require less water when proper gardening practices are followed. These include proper soil preparation, selecting the right plant for the site and planting correctly. Proper irrigation is also important along with the use of mulch and weed control. The final result is healthy plants and a more efficient use of water in the high desert climate of Nevada.

### Cultural Factors

A large majority of landscape plants, once established, are relatively drought tolerant. It is important to realize that plants which are not considered drought tolerant can still be planted and water conserved if the following gardening practices are employed:

1. Using organic materials and/or water holding polymers at time of planting.
2. Installing drip or soaker hose irrigation systems.
3. Using organic mulch on top of ground where plants are growing.
4. Controlling water-robbing weeds adjacent to landscape plants.
5. Using anti-transpirants to reduce excessive water loss from leaves and stems.

By implementing water-saving gardening techniques at the time of planting and utilizing a water efficient irrigations system, even non-drought tolerant plants can be grown successfully in our climates.

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