

# Nursery Papers

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## Being 'Waterwise' is now essential!

Gardening behaviour and attitudes are changing as a result of water restrictions. As a result, retailers and producers should recognise that consumers are looking for:

- Simple and clear information on the water requirements of plants;
- How to maximise watering efficiency and are interested in the use of water saving devices/products;
- The industry to be proactive in promoting more efficient watering systems; and
- Businesses to demonstrate they are efficient and responsible water users.

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Nursery & Garden Industry  
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## Water restriction effects on gardeners, and how to respond

**The study *Gardening behaviour and attitudes in the context of water restrictions* was completed in February 2004 by Creative Dialogue Pty Ltd. It combined focus groups and telephone survey research methods to give information on gardening attitudes and behaviour of householders. The sample size for the study is shown in table 1.**

**The main recommendations from the study are to:**

- Think nationally act locally;
- Be proactive;
- Form strategic partnerships;
- Have city based Waterwise competition;
- Get behind the big Waterwise concept;
- Encourage 1-2-3 Drop retailing;
- Position industry as the waterwise plant authority;
- Improve waterwise accreditation; and
- Provide other flexible solutions.

The results clearly indicate the need for businesses in the nursery & garden industry to provide credible information on being 'waterwise'.



One of the focus groups used to develop information on gardening attitudes and behaviour of householders during water restrictions.

Location	Focus groups	Telephone interviews
Brisbane	2	60
Gold Coast	2	60
Melbourne	2	120
Perth	2	61
Sydney	2	120
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>421</b>

**Table 1 – Sample size for 'Gardening behaviour and attitudes in the context of water restrictions' study.**

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## Current garden watering practices

Investigation into current garden watering practices revealed that:

- Hand held hoses are most commonly used in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane;
- Perth and Adelaide have the highest concentration of installed watering systems (82% and 62% respectively) while Sydney has the lowest (18%);
- Of those who installed a watering system, 73% were self installed and 27% were professionally installed;
- The need to save water both inside and outside the home is well recognised and accepted throughout Australia with 66% agreeing with the statement 'I don't mind saving shower and washing machine water for my garden'.

### Tips

- Supply irrigation systems and/or provide professional installation.
- Assist customers in checking their self installed irrigation system are functioning efficiently, and/or provide audits or adjustments of installed systems.
- Stock and promote products to improve irrigation function, such as auto-timers and rain sensors.

## Attitudes towards gardening

Unfortunately, mandatory water restrictions are having a negative effect on the pleasure and enjoyment aspect of the garden and gardening, as seen in diagram 1.

Dedicated gardeners are people who love their gardens; spend a lot of time in the garden; are highly motivated towards their garden; and say nothing else competes. This group has decreased 3% since Spring 2001 and is now at 9%.

The majority of gardeners enjoy gardening but other activities compete for their attention. This group has increased by 6% to 74% since Spring 2001.

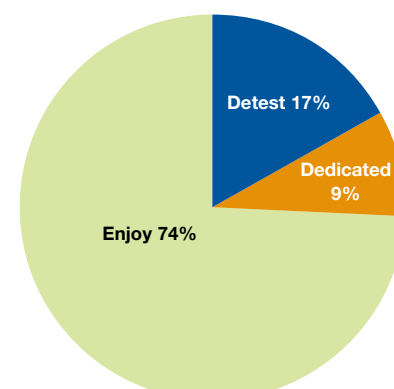
And finally, 17% of gardeners say it is a chore and only do it when necessary. This group has declined 3% since Spring 2001.

Overall, 59% of householders said they really do want to look after their garden while 23% indicated they would let their garden go under the current water restrictions.

### Tips

- Promote the value of gardens to people, such as the aesthetics, improved home values, peace and relaxation.
- Reaffirm the pleasure and enjoyment aspects of gardens.
- The majority of householders are motivated to look after their gardens – so help them!
- The majority may enjoy gardening and looking after their garden, but also have other competing interests – they need their gardening solutions to be easy and low fuss.

Diagram 1 – The attitude towards gardening across Australia



"I'd rather not shower than the plants miss out" was a claim made by a dedicated gardener during a focus group interview.

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## Attitudes towards water restrictions

Australians are generally compliant to mandatory water restrictions. However, as always, there are variations in attitudes, as seen in diagram 2.

Water restrictions are more readily accepted in areas where they have been in place for longer. However, despite an overall high level of acceptance of water restrictions, many householders are cynical towards local councils, governments and some businesses that are perceived as regularly wasting water such as watering parks and gardens during the day, leaky pipes and business regularly washing infrastructure or equipment.

As the water supplier is often seen solely as enforcing and policing the restrictions, they are not necessarily considered as the place for information on being waterwise. This translates into opportunities for businesses in the nursery and garden industry to provide authoritative waterwise information.

The majority of people adapt to water restrictions. For example, in Perth where restrictions have been in place for many years, householders are more confident they can have and enjoy the garden they want and stay within the water restrictions.

### Tips

- In areas where water restrictions are relatively new, such as Sydney, householders need more reassurance and help to deal with them.
- Provide waterwise information, products and services as householders generally want to do the right thing and avoid being fined.
- Be aware of the public attitude to those groups perceived as 'wasting' water – try to demonstrate practices that meet restrictions wherever possible.

## Perceptions of water restrictions

88% of householders believe they are already doing the best they can to save water. Whether they could actually do more is hard to determine, but the opportunity exists to reinforce and reassure people about being waterwise.

Perceptions vary between cities as to whether water restrictions are temporary or permanent, as seen in table 2.

People who believe that the restrictions are permanent are more likely to invest in something to have a beautiful garden given the water restrictions. Conversely, those who think the restrictions are temporary are less like to actively change what they do in their garden for the water restrictions.

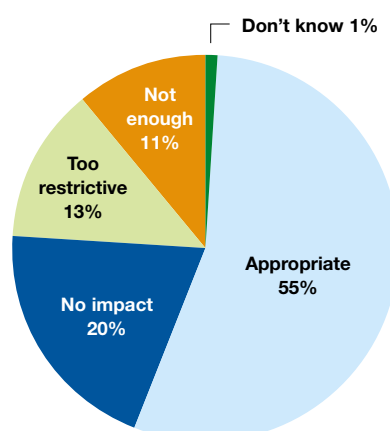
### Tips

- Discover what your customers are already doing to be waterwise and offer encouragement with new choices and options.
- Remember those who believe water restrictions are permanent are more likely to invest in waterwise strategies, products and services.

Table 2 – Householder perceptions of the length of water restrictions

	Total %	Sydney %	Melbourne %	Brisbane %	Adelaide %	Perth %
<b>Permanent</b>	57	45	53	47	73	82
<b>Temporary</b>	23	34	29	22	10	3
<b>Hard to say</b>	20	21	18	32	17	15
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100

Diagram 2 – Householder attitudes towards the water restrictions across Australia



"I've had to change my thinking. I used to think eventually it will rain, but not now". Claim made during one of the focus group interviews.



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## Changes in household behaviour

Investigation into behaviour change revealed that:

- 51% of households have stopped watering their lawn;
- 23% have stopped buying seedlings;
- 16% no longer have a vegie patch; and
- 6% have stopped watering altogether.

Responding to mandatory water restrictions, householders fall into one of three core groups, as seen in diagram 3.

The delayed reactions group, which is significantly larger in Sydney (35%), is the most in need of reassurance, solutions and ideas. Householders still establishing gardens are a key target for the nursery & garden industry as they are more open to new suggestions.

The too hard group are the least committed to their gardens and the industry should try to ensure this group doesn't grow in size.

On average, 42% plan to make changes to their garden. This varied depending on location with:

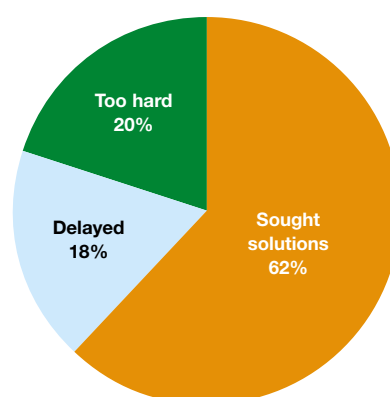
- 56% for Perth;
- 30% for Brisbane;
- 50% for Sydney;
- 37% for Melbourne; and
- 33% for Adelaide.

Approximately half of the changes planned to gardens are in response to water restrictions with the majority considering plants that use less water, as seen in table 3.

**Table 3 – Types of garden changes planned**

People who are planning to make changes	%
New landscape/reshape/remodelling	25
Planting new trees/extra planting/shrubs	25
<b>Trying to make it lower maintenance/native plants</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Adding garden beds/making more garden to reduce lawn</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Planting some that nee less water/hardy ones</b>	<b>11</b>
Paving/rocks/pebbles	11
Putting in drip irrigation (all in Sydney)	2
Putting in pool/spa	3
Other	11
Total	145

**Diagram 3 – Householder response to water restrictions**



### Tips

- Many householders (42%) plan to make changes to their garden and are willing to make adjustments to assist water use efficiency. Take advantage of this.
- Produce, supply and promote a range of plants that need less water.
- Encourage householders not to delay making changes to the water use efficiency of their garden.



Ensure your customers know which plants don't need a lot of water.

## Water saving behaviours utilised by households

### 1 Mulching

Mulching is the most common household water saving activity, with 63% having mulched in the last 12 months because of the water restriction. Other benefits are also recognised, such as weed control and improving aesthetics. Therefore mulching is regarded as very beneficial and good value for money. It also involved the least permanent changes to existing gardens.

### 2 Hardy plants

Householders have been seeking plants that require less water during the year as a result of the water restrictions. 38% percent have planted plants other than natives that require less water while 29% planted more native plants. This highlights that consumers are looking for choice when it comes to waterwise plants and want plants to suit a variety of garden styles.

### 3 Wetting agents

37% of households have used a soil wetting product in the last 12 months. This figure rose to 62% in Perth and dropped to 17% in Brisbane. It appeared consumers who used wetting agents were happy with their results.

### 4 Water recycling

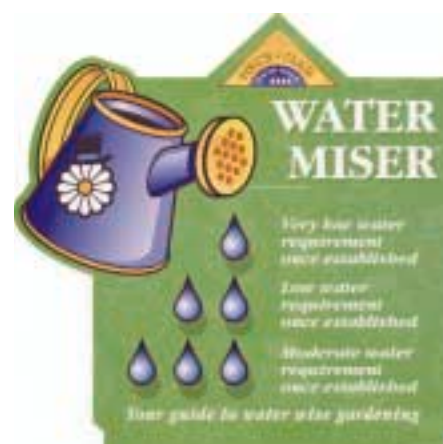
Table 4 shows that water recycling is most common in Sydney. Overall, 33% of households bucketed bath and/or shower water to use on the garden and 28% use recycled washing machine water on the garden.

### 5 Lawn replacement

While 21% of households have replaced or reduced the amount of lawn, those with young children are very reluctant to give up their lawn area. This group may be encouraged to look at species that need less water. They also need advice to help them minimise the amount of water they use on maintaining their lawn.

### 6 Water tank investigation

On average, 20% of households said they have installed or investigated a rain water tank system in the last year as a result of water restrictions. However, many are concerned about the potential 'ugly' aesthetics of a rainwater tank. Water tanks were less attractive in Perth, probably due to the high incidence of bores or spear pumps.



Greenhills Nursery, Victoria, has developed and trade marked its own 'Touch of Class Water Miser'™ range.

Table 4 – Incidence of water recycling

	Total %	Sydney %	Melbourne %	Brisbane %	Adelaide %	Perth %
Bucket bath and shower water to use on garden	33	41	40	15	21	31
Recycled washing machine water to use on garden	28	37	33	20	18	20

### Tips

- Reinforce the need for re-mulching on a regular basis.
- Grow and/or supply and promote a wide range of plants that require less water, not just natives and succulents.
- Use positive statements from gardeners to promote the benefits of soil wetting products.
- Provide information about the impact of recycled water on the garden and highlight plants particularly sensitive/tolerant to the use of this water.
- Demonstrate how rainwater tanks can be stylish and/or made aesthetically pleasing and provide contact information for rainwater tank suppliers.
- Promote appropriate lawn species and information on care and maintenance to minimise water requirements.

## Information about water use in the garden

Investigations into how people preferred to receive information about water use in the garden revealed that:

- Garden centres were overwhelmingly recognised as the preferred source of information regarding how to save water in the garden (52%)
- One third (32%) of householders said they would definitely visit a model waterwise garden, while 45% said they probably would visit.
- One third (33%) indicated that they are very interested in a website where they could type in their suburb, soil type and garden type to gain suggestions on managing the garden in terms of water and plant selection.

### 1 The 1, 2, 3 water drop concept

The 1, 2, 3 water drop concept was extremely well received. This places plants in three categories, allowing gardeners to easily group plants together based on their water needs:

- 1 drop – requires little water once established;
  - 2 drops – needs some additional water; and
  - 3 drops – regular water is required.
- 58% said that they would definitely seek out such a display at a garden centre, while 24% said they might seek out such a display.



**The WA Water Corporation has developed, in conjunction with the Australian Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme (AGCAS), a waterwise accreditation scheme.**

### 2 Providing waterwise information services

The response to a dedicated waterwise section within garden centres was overwhelmingly positive. Householders appreciate retailers that cluster together waterwise products.

Participants also responded very well to the Western Australian model of waterwise accredited garden centres. Almost half of the respondents (49%) said waterwise accreditation of garden centres was very important, and a further 39% said it was quite important.

However, only 18% said they would definitely attend a workshop run by a garden centre on having a good looking garden despite the water restrictions. A further 30% said they would probably attend.

The study also highlighted that there is some level of interest in niche services such as:

- A one stop grey water recycling shop;
- A one stop rain water tank shop; and
- A specialist to assess garden water use efficiency with the potential to gain a water rebate from the water supplier.

### For further information

The complete report, 'Gardening behaviour and attitudes in the context of water restrictions, February 2004' contains comprehensive information on this study.

To obtain a copy, contact Rebecca Dawson, Program Manager – Water, at NGIA on tel: 02 9876 5200, by fax: 02 9876 6360 or via email: [rebecca.dawson@ngia.com.au](mailto:rebecca.dawson@ngia.com.au).

'Getting waterwise messages to your customers', *Nursery Paper* 2003/04

### Tips

- Get involved in community education activities, such as developing model waterwise gardens or running waterwise garden competitions, preferably in conjunction with water service providers and/or local councils.
- Develop a display which gives your customers ideas for different garden styles which are waterwise.
- Develop a list of waterwise plants suitable for use in the local area and for different soil types/site conditions.
- Develop waterwise sections for products in your business.
- If you are a retailer, become accredited under the Australian Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme (AGCAS). In Western Australia, this then enables you to become Waterwise Accredited. Elsewhere, it gives you credibility as a reliable source of information.
- Provide simple waterwise point-of-sale material, including information about the comparative water requirements of different plants and tips for reducing water use using different products.
- If you are a producer, are you labelling your plants with simple water requirement information?
- If you are a retailer, are all your staff knowledgeable on water saving practices and products as well as knowing which plants have low water use requirements?

### Acknowledgements

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