

Entranosa Water News

January 31, 2008

Responses to Lack of Water. Since New Years Day we've responded, literally, to a couple of hundred calls of 'no water' where something was frozen, up to 25 calls a day. This is a HUGE change for us. In years past, we may have responded to 25 in the worst month, so this was a significant event. In a couple of cases, our water main had actually frozen – we dug it out and replaced as much as 80 feet of water main to restore service; when the problem was our meter, we either thawed the meter or replaced it; for those blockages in the service line on the customer side of the meter, we're limited in what we can do. We found some service lines were too shallow or were bedded in rock that doesn't protect as well as dirt, some were exposed to the weather through an open crawl space under the home, sometimes the home was vacant for a week or two and the line just froze from nonuse. We found the earth frozen over two feet deep. In periods of long term cold, such as we've just experienced, consider opening a faucet a little bit every night to keep water moving through the line (catch it in a bucket and water your plants). Regardless of the cause, we regret the inconvenience when this happens and welcome your calls – we'll help when and where we can.

Household Water Pressure and Cross Contamination. *(we run this every year at this time, but it bears reiterating).* Each of our meter installations has a pressure reducing valve (PRV) and a backflow prevention unit (a check valve) incorporated into it. The PRV regulates the pressure from the system to your property and prevents pressure spikes that may be generated by the water system (valves being opened and closed, hydrants slamming shut, or pumps coming on and off) from entering the plumbing in your home. The check valve protects the water system from contamination that may occur in your home. *The check valve allows water to enter your home but not backflow into the main system, and it effectively creates an isolated pressure environment in your home. The plumbing code, since 1997, has required the installation of a small expansion tank, or other device, to diminish the effects of transient high pressure in your home that is created by heat generating devices (hot water heaters, boilers) that you may utilize. We have documented instances of widely oscillating pressures within homes (40 psi) that do NOT have these expansion tanks or other pressure reducing devices, and damage can occur.* We encourage you to assess the needs of your home and consult a licensed plumber, if necessary.

Weather and Water Use. Your water use this past month was about the same as last year, less than 185 gallons per day. While personal habits differ greatly, if your usage was over 13,000 gallons, you should consider looking for a leak – toilet, yard line, dripping faucet (that you didn't cause to drip!), etc. The weather is supposed to have intermittent cold for the next month, but as you think ahead to the spring, and working in your yards, please consider using techniques for low water use landscaping. The opposite side of this newsletter provides some proven tips.

Isolation Valves ... and as you consider working outside in the spring – factor in the installation of isolation valves (small ball valves) in your service line. They will allow you to trouble shoot leaks that may occur – and save time, water, and damage.

CALL BEFORE YOU DIG – IT IS THE LAW.

260-1990

Entranosa Water & Wastewater Association
281-8700

Waterwise Tips in the Garden

from the Entranosa Water & Wastewater Association
Conservation Committee

Think Shelter from Drying Winds

In our part of New Mexico, dry and windy days are all too common. To conserve water, you may want to construct windbreaks. These may be as simple (and ugly) as rows of old tires. Vegetables can be planted in the tires without the fuss of filling them with dirt. After the growing season, the tires can be stored out of sight.

Other choices for windbreaks might be straw bales or old boards. The boards can be placed on top of newly planted rows of seeds. Remove the boards to water the seeds, but replace them to protect the wet ground from the wind. With the first sign of sprouts, take the boards off the top and prop them up to block the prevailing winds. Bamboo stakes on either side of the boards will prevent them from flopping over when the wind shifts.

Save Water by Creating Shade

Take advantage of the shade created by trees in your yard to establish new plants. In the absence of trees, consider creating a shady spot using lathe or bamboo.

Trees can be trained and pruned to be living shade barriers. Manchurian bush apricots are tough and vigorous growers that can withstand a lot of pruning, encouraging them to spread in the desired directions.

Choose strong, vigorous trees for your shade barriers so they can be shaped to fit your needs. By choosing small, you don't have to water as much or deal with flying branches in a storm. Encouraging the trees to make canopies of leaves just over your head increases the coolness of the shade. Choosing a fruit tree means that some years, at least, you might get a crop.

Container Gardening

Terracotta or clay pots are almost worth-less for container gardening in our climate. The water evaporates through the pot. Plastic tubs work much better. Wooden half barrels are good for container gardening if you waterproof them first to prevent water from evaporating out the sides.

Save Water by Mowing

Mowing can be save water. Mowing your property before the grasses set their seeds creates a climate for the grass to return. You will create a yard of mostly tough grasses that don't require extra water other than the rain.

The trick is to mow high and not often. Mowing too low "scalps" the grass blades and exposes them to wind and heat damage. It also exposes the topsoil, which will blow away. Tough, native grasses hold topsoil in place and gradually create a cool oasis around your home without subjecting it to the fire danger of tall, dry weeds.

Create 'sponges' for your Plants

Dig a hold around your plants or trees & fill it with a porous material (shredded newspapers or junk mail, horse manure, or old brush, depending on the size of the hole). Cover the hole with dirt and presto! You have an area that collects water and saves it for your plants, safe from the wind.