

In 2015, the majority of Washington was experiencing drought conditions and parts of the Inland Empire suffered from severe drought conditions. Even though drought conditions may be less severe, water conservation efforts need to be at the forefront of every resident's mind. While there are many actions an individual can take on the short term, residents need to be considering long term plans.

One of the easiest ways to begin conserving water is by transforming the parking strip which is located in the front of many homes. This is typically a smaller area and is a good first project to see what will work best for your property. The majority of homes in the Inland Empire area have grassy parking strips. Turning your grass into a single hard scape with concrete, bricks or asphalt may save water but it increases stormwater runoff which is a serious problem for our Spokane River.

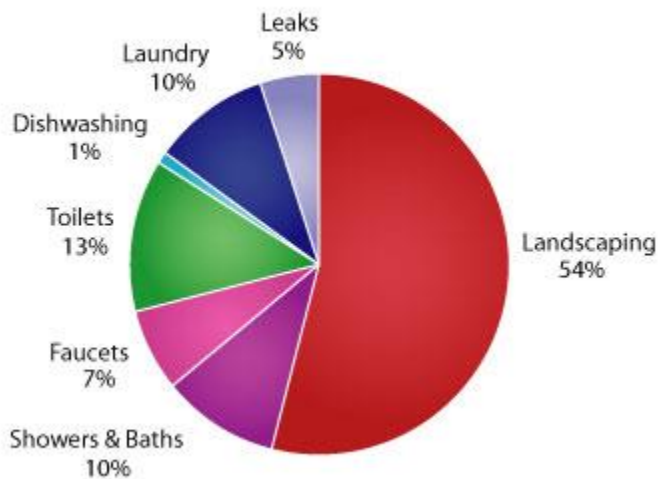


Use pavers, rocks, gravel or bark between plants and be sure your design allows water to permeate into the soil.



Some homes use a mixture of native grasses with some ornamental shrubs and trees. Others try a mixture of perennials, annuals, bulbs, and assorted ground cover but you need to be careful that the plants you select are well suited for the typical climate and drought conditions. Choosing plants with high water needs can lead to overwatering and are simply not sustainable in our area.

Single Family Residential Water Use



American families will use approximately 320 gallons of water each and every day, it is estimated that 30 percent will be used for outdoor activities. The majority being used for gardening and landscape care. The shocking fact is when added up across the nation that is about 9 billion gallons of water a day devoted purely to gardening, landscapes, and lawns. For families in the Inland Empire, outdoor water usage during non-drought conditions can increase to 60% with up to 50% of this water lost to evaporation, run-off, and windy conditions.

Why Start with The Parking Strip?

The parking strip is one of the most difficult spots in home landscaping to conserve water. First, the issue of over spray, results in water winding up in the street. Secondly, most traditional forms of water conservation such as drip irrigation, are harder to apply to the parking strip. Choosing this small area will show the early effects of conservation and return on your investment when you track changes in your water bill.

Important First Steps in Parking Strip Modification

As a homeowner it is your responsibility to check all local laws and regulations before beginning any type of home improvement project. The same is true with parking strip modifications, there are local regulations that the homeowner needs to be aware of. There may trees, shrubs, and grasses that are too tall and cause a safety concern.



Secondly, it is important to understand all of the utilities that may be buried in the parking strip. There may be water and gas pipes hidden just below the surface. It is important to call 811 at least 2 days before the project is set to begin. The homeowner can also use the free online service known as CallBeforeYouDig.org. Knowing what is beneath the surface is a valuable resource and the law.



If the property is located with a community that is part of a homeowner's association, it is important to get the proper permission from the governing board.

Physical Steps in Preparing the Parking Strip for Modification. The first step in modifying the parking is to remove the grass or sod from the location. This can be done by gently placing a spade into the ground about 6 inches deep. The lawn should be cut into manageable strips that can be easily pulled out.

Once the grass has been removed the soil will need to be cultivated with a hand tool. No power tools such as the rototiller should be used as to not to disturb any utility lines below. During this process it is good measure to include composts,

manure, and other organic matter into the existing soil. Once the organic matter has been mixed well, spread the soil evenly.



At this point you will be able to plant your vegetation and modify the parking strip for drought conditions. It is important to keep in mind that the vegetation will grow, show spacing should be adequately considered.

Choosing The Best Drought Resistant Plants for The Parking Strip

Every property owner is going to have their own designs and ideals for the perfect drought resistant garden design. Below are several of the best drought tolerant plants that can be used in the parking strip. These plants are guaranteed to brighten up the area surrounding the sidewalk and save the property owner money on the water bill. These taller plants are the perfect starting point for the center line of the parking strip. The majority of plants that are chosen should be designed to grow in the USDA Hardiness Zone 5.



Agastache – These stunning flowers sport large flower spike of purple or white and are highly desired by bees. These plants grow up to 5 feet tall and will bring color to your parking strip every season as they are perennials. Agastache will do best in well-drained soil that features full sun.



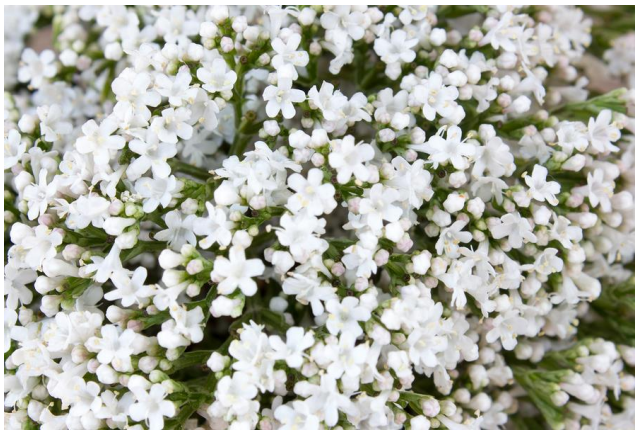
Catmint - Another tall plant that is perfect for the middle or center of parking strips is the fragrant Catmint. This impressive flower can reach up to heights of 4 feet and will feature striking lavender flowers. These fragrant flowers are excellent at attracting bees and birds into the parking strip garden.



Lantana – The Latana is a gorgeous flower that has red, yellow, and orange florets that last long into the season. The Lantana enjoys well-drained soil and full sun, it is appreciated due do its fast growing nature and tall height of up to 6 feet. While these taller trees, shrubs, and flowers are desirable to the property, variation is key to a beautiful strip. Larger plants will dominate the middle and smaller plants can add stunning bursts of color. Consider the following plants:



Veronica –Veronica has the potential to be the show-stopper in a parking strip garden. These striking fast growing purple flowers reach a height of 2 feet. Very easy to grow and able to thrive in well-drained soil and full sun they become a favorite of home gardeners.



Yarrow – Another flower that is perfect for parking strips is yarrow. This fragrant flower reaches a height of 2 feet and can spread decently. Designed for growth in full sun and highly drought tolerant, yarrow makes a gorgeous addition to the mixture. The hardiness and vibrant colors make this a drought resistant favorite.



California Poppy – A final flower to consider for the edging of the parking strip garden is the California Poppy. This blue or golden flower will grow to a height of 6 inches. The flowers are brilliant enough to add a gorgeous contrast to the garden. Fast growing and fully drought tolerant they will be a welcome condition in any garden. While this is the state flower of California it looks beautiful in the Washington!

Removing old grass and water hogging plants is one step the typical home owner can take in helping with water conservation efforts and saving money on bills. It is a rather easy project to start and can be usually finished in an afternoon. For residents wanting to eventually remove all the grass on the property, starting with the parking strip is the best solution.

About the Author: Jonathan Leger is a sponsored member of the Garden Writer's Association and a gardening enthusiast. He runs [Cabbage Roses](#), a small site dedicated to the history, education and care of a variety of roses.