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The American Gardener (ISSN 1087-9978) is published bimonthly (January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, November/December) by the American Horticultural Society, 7931 East Boulevard Drive, Alexandria, VA 22308-1300, (703) 768-5700. Membership in the Society includes a subscription to *The American Gardener*. Annual dues are \$35; two years, \$60. International dues are \$50. \$10 of annual dues goes toward magazine subscription. Periodicals postage paid at Alexandria, Virginia, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Please send Form 3579 to *The American Gardener*, 7931 East Boulevard Drive, Alexandria, VA 22308-1300.

Botanical nomenclature is based on *The American Horticultural Society A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants*, on *A Synonymized Checklist of the Vascular Flora of the United States, Canada and Greenland* and on the *Royal Horticultural Society Index of Garden Plants*. Opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Society. Manuscripts, artwork, and photographs sent for possible publication will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We cannot guarantee the safe return of unsolicited material. Back issues are available at \$8 per copy.

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An Inside Look

HERE IN THE East we have suffered through one of the driest periods on record, but relief seems to finally be on the way. After months of little or no rain, I am beginning to see puddles on the runways of some airports and on the cleared spaces along the highways. It's a sign that the thirsty ground is finally not soaking up every bit of precipitation that falls.

Despite this relief, it seems certain that water availability will be the number one issue of the 2002 garden season. In the East and in the Pacific Northwest, we take it for granted—and even complain when it rains too much—but during droughts we get a feel for what our fellow gardeners in the Southwest and the Great Plains face on a regular basis.

Because of the drought, I've noticed a lot of newspapers and television shows promoting smart watering practices. That's helpful, but smart watering practices should be used year round rather than just in times of water shortages. Watering wisely is an important component of the SMARTGARDEN™ program that AHS has been promoting for the last two years.

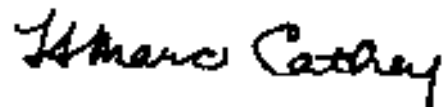
A SMARTGARDEN™ article on water conservation published in the July/August 2000 issue of *The American Gardener* suggested watering plants regularly and deeply, using drip or trickle systems rather than sprinklers, and mulching the soil surface to reduce evaporation. Where possible, group plants with similar moisture requirements so watering systems can be tailored to different sections of the garden.

In addition to being a critical resource, water brings an invaluable aesthetic to the garden in the shape of pools, ponds, waterfalls, and other water features. All of my mother's relatives in North Carolina had ponds that contained fish and water lilies—not to mention snakes, mosquitoes, and water hyacinths—in the back or side yards of their homes. In an emergency, these were used to water seedling tobacco plants prior to transplanting to the farm, as well as the vegetable and fruit garden. Since the land my mother's family occupied was just above the water table, drainage ditches and flat-bottom boats were an essential part of the gardening scheme, too.

Today we have much improved water gardening equipment and know-how available to us, including pool liners, lightweight piping, recirculating pumps, and new methods to control algae. If you don't already have a water feature in your garden, Associate Editor Carole Ottesen's article in this issue on how to install a pond will inspire you. Using a flexible liner, a basic small pond can be created over the course of a weekend.

Meanwhile, the forces of nature will challenge all of our growing skills this coming summer. Keep gardening, because better days are coming.

Ever in green,



—H. Marc Cathey, *AHS President Emeritus*

