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Lower That Water Bill!

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Up, up, up the water bills go each year, and we are approaching those water-gulping summer months. I've said it before, but it bears repeating this time of year: You can save some SERIOUS cash if you are "water wise" with your landscape.

Number one on the list to making your garden water wise is assessing your lawn areas. Sure, it's traditional to have that front yard patch of green. But tradition fast loses its appeal with water bills in the hundreds of dollars. Lawns are fine if you have kids and pets, but look at that grass as \$\$\$, and keep your water-hungry lawn areas as small as you can. Very few families play in their front yards, so start there first. And take a look at replacing the lawn you do need with some of the newer types of grasses that require less water like fescues. Start a new tradition and put your saved water money towards a new patio area and BBQ!

Next up, make sure your sprinklers are on a timer and you have a "rain cut off," so you don't automatically water if it's raining. (D'oh!) Water in the early morning, so you aren't over-watering to compensate for wind and sun evaporation. And except for lawn or ground cover, change your overhead sprinklers to soakers or drip types. Look for kits for converting overhead sprinklers to drip, so you don't have to pull everything up and start over. Another great tip: Buy a handheld water meter at the local hardware store and make sure you're not over-watering your yard.

And here is that Mulch Mantra: don't forget to top off your water-conserving efforts with a 2-3" layer of mulch. Nitrogenized redwood mulch or a 50-50 blend of the mulch with chicken manure will not only curtail water evaporation it will also keep the weeds at bay, fertilize your garden and improve your soil's texture over time.