



by Anne Moss, HCMG

Drip Irrigation and Soaker Hoses

Before sprinklers are banned under watering restrictions, home gardeners need to be thinking about other watering options. **Drip irrigation** and **soaker hoses** are two low-volume watering methods, both recommended under the Texas Agrilife Extension Service's Earth-Kind Landscaping program. The advantages to these irrigation systems is that water soaks into the ground slowly, and is much less likely to run off or evaporate, as is the usual case with sprinklers. An additional benefit is that the plant foliage does not get wet, which helps avoid fungal diseases.



A **drip irrigation** system normally consists of tubing with emitters laid on top of the ground. An emitter is a smaller tube attached to the main tube, allowing the water to drip out slowly. A typical arrangement would be to have one or sometimes two emitters per plant. The cost of a drip irrigation system varies widely, depending on the area to be covered and whether you set it up yourself or have it professionally installed. Drip irrigation systems that come in kits are useful for smaller areas or container plants, and can be attached to your outdoor faucet. The kit will usually include a backflow preventer, pressure valve, filter, tubing and drip emitters. Larger systems that are professionally installed will connect directly to your water system and may be laid out



in separate "zones" to help even out the water pressure and to give you the choice of watering all or only part of the yard at a time.

A **soaker hose** is a porous hose — often made from recycled tires — that allows the water to leak out of tiny holes that cover the entire hose. Soaker hoses are usually better suited to smaller areas where there are many plants close together. The hoses come in lengths of 10, 25, 50 feet and more, and can attach to the end of a regular hose. Soaker hoses are generally run for a shorter time than drip irrigation because the water runs out more quickly. Soaker hoses are cheaper and easier to install yourself. Make sure that the hose is running on ground that is lower than the water source.



I use drip irrigation for more permanent plantings and soaker hoses for temporary plants such as vegetables and my "experimental" perennial beds. The hoses are easily moved from bed to bed, if desired. I snake the hose from one plant to the next or wrap it in concentric circles around shrubs using small rocks to keep the hoses in place. Both drip irrigation tubes and soaker hoses may be covered by 2-3 inches of mulch.

Here are more watering options:

The Treegator® and the Treegator® Jr. Pro are heavy-duty plastic bags that are filled up with your garden hose. The water then drips from two emitters underneath the bag over a period of several hours. The Treegator® holds up to 20 gallons of water and can be used on trees up to 4 inches in diameter, or two bags can be zipped



Treegator®



Treegator® Jr Pro

together for trees up to 8" diameter. The Treegator® Jr. Pro holds up to 15 gallons of water and can be used on a tree or shrub with a trunk up to 6 inches across. These work best where there is a level, mulched surface. See www.TREEGATOR.com for more information.