

Is The Drought Over? That Is The Wrong Question.



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When people hear that I work for a water district, they always want to talk water. "How is the snowpack doing this year?" they ask. "Are we almost out of the drought?" Sometimes I tell them that I actually just do marketing, but other times I engage. After all, I grew up in Utah, so I know the buzzwords too. Drought, low snowpack, and shrinking reservoirs have been conversation pieces for years. It wasn't until last month when the National Weather Service announced that Utah was free of drought conditions for the first time since 2011 that it suddenly occurred to me, perhaps asking if the drought is over is the wrong question.

Now don't get me wrong, I think it is important to monitor Utah's snowpack and it is definitely important to know Utah's water situation, but a label of drought or no drought shouldn't impact the way we, as Utahns, use water—especially on our landscapes. Here is why:

1. Your landscape doesn't need more water, it probably needs less.

Sometimes I hear people say that they cut back on their watering "because of the drought," but did you know that most Utahns use twice as much water as their yard needs? And that overwatering can actually cause as many problems as underwatering? The soil under your grass is like a sponge: it can only hold so much water before the excess runs off. When you give your landscape too much water, it makes the root systems of your plants and lawn shallow and weak. Experts recommend not watering at all until late spring (think Mother's Day or later) and even then, they encourage watering deeply but less frequently.

It is actually ok to let your yard show some signs of drought stress. This causes roots to grow deeper searching for water. Longer, stronger roots mean stronger grass and plants that can outcompete weeds, recover more easily from damage, and resist disease. So, while you don't have to cut back watering "because of the drought" this year, you should cut back watering "because of your yard."

2. Drought isn't our only water supply challenge.

Utah's population is expected to double by 2060, but our water supply won't. Not to mention that developing new water sources is becoming more difficult and more expensive as suppliers have to seek sources further and further away. Even wet years like this one will require Utahns to use water more wisely once our population increases. Creating reserves of water now will help Utah avoid a water crisis like we have seen in California.

3. You can't predict the weather.

Just two years ago, Utah suffered its driest water year since the late 1800s (before it was even a state!) While good water years are always welcome, they don't guarantee water in years to come. If there is one thing we can predict about the weather, it's that you just can't predict the weather. That is why it is important to use our resources responsibly all of the time—not just during a drought.

If asking if the drought is over is the wrong question, what's the right one? Asking how you can use water more efficiently. Visit Conservation Garden Park to find resources

and classes for making your yard and lifestyle more Utah-friendly—so you can water correctly whether we're in a drought or not. <https://conservationgardenpark.org/>