City of Thornton
Water Use Rules and Regulations
Stage 1 Drought
Effective March 15, 2026

The following Rules and Regulations are used to implement the city of Thornton's mandatory water use restriction program pursuant to a Stage 1 Drought Declaration effective March 15, 2026. The goal of these Rules and Regulations is to reduce overall water demand by 10%.

1) **Outdoor Irrigation**: The following rules and guidelines are designed to preserve the Thornton community's water and increase drought tolerance of turf. Irrigation of outdoor living landscape materials are limited as follows:

a. **Wait until May 1 to irrigate turf and to activate automated sprinkler systems**: It is recommended that turf be left dormant until May 1, and automated sprinkler systems not be charged or used for irrigation until May 1.

b. Irrigation of established turf is prohibited **between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.** See **1) d. New/Replacement Turf** for turf installation and irrigation requirements.

c. After May 1, irrigation of established turf is **limited to two (2) days per week.** Table 1 provides a Summer Watering Guide showing the recommended number of minutes to water each zone, per watering day. Individual landscape watering times may vary due to multiple factors, including weather and soil conditions.

Table 1. 2-day per week watering guide with recommended minutes per zone, per watering day

	Fixed Spray Heads	Rotor Heads	Rotary Heads	Manual Sprinklers
Jan-Apr	Water trees and shrubs as needed			
May	15	33	42	23
June	22	48	61	34
July	24	52	65	36
August	20	44	55	31
Sept	14	31	39	22
Oct	Water trees and shrubs as needed			

To allow water to soak into the ground and avoid runoff, we recommend the **cycle and soak method** of watering. Break watering times into 2-3 shorter cycles to get the most out of your watering.

d. **New/Replacement Turf:** The installation of turf is **prohibited from July 1 to August 31.** Permits are required for the irrigation of new or replacement turf seed or sod and are available April 16 (for watering starting May 1) to June 1 0, and September 1 to October 10. Permits allow watering outside of the 2-day per week schedule for 21 days for both cool season turf seed and sod and require a $50 administrative fee per property address. Native grass installations will be given 42 days to establish warm season grass variations, as needed. Native grass permits needing 42 days to establish seed will require a $100 administrative fee. Permits are issued by the City of Thornton Infrastructure Department at ThorntonWater.com.

e. **Public School Properties, City Parks, Athletic/Playing Fields and City Maintained Public Areas:** May irrigate turf areas outside of the 2-day watering schedule as needed 1) to preserve turf subject to heavy public use; 2) to appropriately irrigate large areas; and 3) to establish new landscapes associated with current construction projects. However, these areas should be irrigated in a manner that meets the 10% water saving goals of the city.

f. **Restricted Water Budget**: Managers of large properties with turf areas of 1 acre or more may apply for a permit to irrigate outside of the 2-day per week watering schedule if the following specific conditions are met: 1) Demonstrate that the irrigation system cannot appropriately irrigate the property's entire turf area in 32 hours per week (2 days per week between the hours of 6 p.m. and 10 a.m.). 2) Follow a water budget that will reduce irrigation water use by 10%. The fee for a Restricted Water Budget Permit is $400. The fine for water use above the designated water budget is $1,000 per irrigation meter and revocation of the permit.

g. **Active City Development Construction Projects:** Active City Development construction projects that have a building permit and are required to establish new landscaping before a certificate of occupancy can be issued are exempt from the Stage 1 drought watering restrictions during establishment. City staff will oversee that contractors are being as efficient as possible during landscape establishment and that after the establishment period they adhere to the watering restrictions. The Water Waste Ordinance will still apply to these properties. New single family residential properties, establishing new landscapes will be required to get a drought irrigation permit for new seed and sod. A $50 permit fee will be required.

h. **Drip Irrigation**: Deep root, drip, micro-spray, bubbler or soaker hose irrigation of trees, shrubs, bushes, dry turf areas, perennial beds, annual flowers and vegetable gardens may occur on any day. The city requests that residents refrain from using these irrigation methods between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. or on windy days.

i. **Hand Watering**: Hand watering of trees, shrubs, bushes, dry turf areas, perennial beds, annual flowers and vegetable gardens may occur on any day. Hand watering means holding in the hand a hose with a shutoff nozzle and does not include operating a hose with a sprinkler or manually operating an automatic irrigation system. The hose must be attended at all times when water is running. The city requests that residents refrain from hand watering between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. or on windy days.

j. **Water Efficiency Programs:** The city of Thornton offers programs and rebates to help water customers irrigate efficiently. For more information on how to save water outdoors, please visit ThorntonWater.com/saving-outdoors. To sign up for a free sprinkler consultation or get a rebate for a weather-based WIFI enabled irrigation controller visit ThorntonWater.com/rebates or contact us at Water@ThorntonWater.com or 720-977-6600.

2) **Pools, Hot Tubs, Fountains, Ponds**:

a. **Fountains, Waterfalls, Ornamental Ponds**: Outdoor fountains and waterfalls that recycle water may be operated, and ornamental ponds can be filled, refilled or topped off. The city requests that water features that do not recycle water be turned down or shut off.

b. **Pools and Hot Tubs**: Pools and hot tubs can be filled, refilled or topped off. Use of pool and hot tub covers is encouraged to reduce water loss through evaporation.

3) **Washing of Vehicles**:

a. Limit car washing to no more than once per week. The city encourages the use of a commercial car wash that recycles water. If washing a car at home, the use of a bucket and/or hose equipped with a shut-off nozzle to prevent water from running continuously is required. (Some HOAs prohibit car washing at residences within their jurisdiction, this does not override their policy.)

b. Vehicles operated within commercial operations or fleets of five or more vehicles, or vehicles offered for sale, lease or rent should be washed no more than once per week.

4) **Washing of Impervious Surfaces**: Use a broom instead of a hose to clean impervious surfaces such as sidewalks, driveways and patios. A power washer may be used when necessary for public health or safety reasons.

a. The use of water for commercial or street-sweeping operations is allowed only as required to remove materials when necessary for public health or safety reasons.

b. The use of water for commercial enterprises for which cleaning with water is an essential element of their business is allowed.

c. The use of power washers to strip paint from the exterior walls of a home for repainting is allowed as long as it is done in a reasonable and prudent manner so as not to waste water.

5) **Serving of Water by Restaurants**: Restaurants are requested to serve water only upon the customer's request.

6) **Water Use for Construction Projects**: Recognizing that water is used to control dust and provide for soil compaction in the construction industry, professional builders may use water for these purposes as long as it is done in a reasonable and prudent manner so as not to waste water. Builders must purchase a **Hydrant Meter Permit** from Utility Billing and pay for the volume of water used on a construction site. The use of water sources other than a permitted hydrant meter is prohibited and shall result in the Stage 1 Drought Warning Penalties listed in Section 9, Table 2. The hydrant meter application can be filled out online by visiting http://forms.thorntonco.gov/UtilityBilling/HydrantMeterApplication.

7) **Water Waste**: Wasting water is prohibited by these Rules and Regulations and by the Thornton City Code. Water waste is defined in the Thornton City Code as the intentional, unintentional, or excessive use of water that is not considered reasonable, prudent or a wise use of water for an authorized purpose, including but not limited to, by way of example, the following:

   a. Allowing water to be applied in any manner, rate or quantity such that the water is allowed to pool or flow across the ground or into any drainage way, such as gutters, streets, sidewalks, alleys or storm drains is prohibited. Exception: Incidental runoff from an irrigation system operated in a reasonable and prudent manner.

   b. Failing to repair, for a period of more than 10 days after notice, leaking or damaged plumbing components, pipe, hose, water meter connections, or irrigation components is prohibited.

8) **Appeal Process for Permit**: Any person or party whose application for a permit is denied may initiate an appeal by requesting in writing a conference with an Infrastructure Department representative within five days of receipt of notice. The decision of the Infrastructure Department representative may be appealed to the Executive Director of Utilities & Infrastructure for Infrastructure within ten days. The decision of the Deputy City Manager is final.

9) **Enforcement of Rules and Regulations**: The customer (owner or occupant of the premises) shall be responsible for complying with these Rules and Regulations. The city may issue a courtesy warning notice to a customer and owner to ensure understanding of the rules and regulations. Violations of the Rules and Regulations or wasting of water will be handled in the following manner:

   a. A written Notice of Violation (Notice) will be personally served, posted on a structure on the property, emailed, or mailed by regular mail to the customer and the owner of the property, if different from the customer.

   b. The customer, or owner of the property notified of a violation, may file a written request for a hearing with the Infrastructure Department within ten days of notice. The hearing will be conducted before a hearing officer.

   c. If the basis for the violation is established, the hearing officer will order the charge to be placed on the water utility bill.

   d. The city may restrict water flow or suspend water service to the premises, in addition to or in lieu of a further Notice after an initial Notice has been sent giving the customer or owner a Notice of Restricted Flow or Suspension with an opportunity for an administrative hearing. A Notice may be sent upon three violations by a customer within a twelve-month period or one violation if the customer expresses intent to ignore the Rules and Regulations by immediate and continued violations.

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The penalties for a violation in a declared Stage 1 Drought Warning are as follows:

Table 2. Stage 1 Drought Warning Penalties

Violation	Stage 1 Drought Single Family, Manufactured Home, Multifamily Individually Metered Water Accounts	Stage 1 Drought Water Used for Construction	Stage 1 Drought Commercial, Multifamily Master Meter, Irrigation Water Accounts
First	$100.00	$1,000.00	$250.00
Second	$250.00	$2,500.00	$500.00
Third and any subsequent violations	$500.00	$5,000.00	$1,000.00

For questions about the Stage 1 Drought declaration or to report a violation of these Rules and Regulations, visit ThorntonWater.com/drought, contact the Water Resources Division at Water@ThorntonWater.com or 720-977-6600. You can also submit a My Thornton request at https://thorntonco.qscend.com/311.

Approved:

Interim Director of Utilities and Infrastructure

3/15/2026
Date