Watering Effectively

Watering is one of the most important parts of a healthy garden. Here are some watering tips to make sure your plants are thriving at every stage.

Quick Tips!

Make sure your soil has enough Organic Matter (see Healthy Soil handout). This will allow it to absorb and hold onto water. A sign of poor soil quality is water pooling on the surface for longer than a few seconds.

Mulch! Cover bare soil between your plants with natural materials like leaves, straw or even grass clippings. This keeps the soil moist right up to the surface, even on very hot days, and means you need to water a lot less often.

Water gently. Think of the rain and how, even when heavy, it hits the earth gently in many small droplets. Try to mimic this with your watering tool, whether it’s a watering can with a proper spout or a hose attachment that makes a gentle rain. Too much water pressure can blast soil away from the roots of your plant!

Water the soil, not the plant. Basically, our plants roots need water, not their leaves. Watering leaves can cause them to burn in the sun or promote diseases and molding.

How often should you water?

- **For your seeds, seedlings and transplants**
  When plants are just getting started they need very regular water, as they have almost no roots! Water them every day if there is no rain, until they are bigger.

- **For your established plants**
  Deep watering and less often is much more effective than shallow watering every day. Once plants have grown beyond seedling stage, by watering deeply (checking to make sure the soil is moist 8 – 12” down) you encourage roots to grow deep and strong. Also, with bigger, older plants, you can let the top 1-inch of soil dry out in between waterings. This prevents weeds, which are typically shallow rooted, from growing effectively.

How to tell when you’ve watered enough?

The simplest way to be sure, is to check. Before you water, dig down a little bit in the soil and see how deep you must go to find moist soil. Then water, wait a few minutes, and check again. The goal is to make the soil moist right up to the surface, but not to drown your plants!
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When is the best time to water?

The very best time to water is very early in the morning, just before sunrise.

Because we cannot always get to our garden that early, anytime in the morning before the day gets hot is fine. Try to avoid watering in the heat of the day, unless your plants are dying, and then be very careful to water only the soil and not the leaves of the plant, as water droplets can cause them to burn in direct, hot sun.

If you water in the evening, know that watering makes the temperature of the soil get colder. Also, water on leaves overnight can lead to problems with mildew and other diseases. In the middle of summer its fine to water at night, but as autumn approaches, watering in the morning is best.

Garden design and saving water

Group plants according to their water needs. Put together plants that need lots of water, like leafy green plants (lettuce, spinach, micro greens), cucumbers, and basil. And group plants that are drought tolerant, like garlic (in our coastal climate you may never need to water it!), chickpeas, dry beans, winter squash.

Know your climate

In Southwestern British Columbia we have mild, wet winters and plenty of rain in the spring. In summer we very often have at least 3 weeks in a row without any rain, and often we have a true drought, with no rainfalls for 6 weeks or more! Annual vegetables will always need water throughout the dry summer, so make sure to plan accordingly. Alternatively, if you garden in the spring and early summer, the rain is usually plentiful.