

Proper Watering

Now that the heat is back, we all need to make sure we are watering our plants, trees and vegetables properly and responsibly. I venture to say that some of you water too often and at the wrong time of day

So here are the basic watering rules. Water for longer periods with a slower flow (water seeps in deeper) and less frequently. But you didn't think it would be that simple did you?

First you need to know your soil. If it is heavy clay soil (it is denser and tends to hold its shape if you form it into a ball with your hand when wet) the water will take longer to seep in and the water will spread out further and absorb slowly. Sandy soil is just the opposite. It doesn't hold a shape when wet and water tends to soak in quickly and straight down. Loamy soil is a combination and it will take water in at a slower pace than sandy, but also more uniformly. You may have all three types of soil in your yard and will need to adjust watering times and flow from sprinkler or drip heads accordingly.

Rule of thumb watering depths: ONE foot for perennials and annual plants (think flowers); TWO feet deep for bushes and roses; THREE feet deep for trees. Lawns need about 8 – 10 inches. Although you do not want the soil to remain wet all the time (doesn't allow the roots to breathe), do not let the soil dry out completely and heat up. This will damage the root system. Based on how much shade and sun your yard and garden get, you will need to adjust the frequency and duration to achieve this balance.

Use a long-neck screw driver (marked at 1, 2 and 3 feet intervals) to test how far down your water goes. Water as normal and wait an hour. Then stick a screw driver into the ground at several intervals around your garden, bushes, trees and lawn. Record how far it went down in each area. Adjust watering duration accordingly.

It is best to water before the sun heats up. Sunrise is a good time, a little earlier if you can (3- 6 a.m.). Once the sun has fully risen, it will evaporate the water before it is all absorbed into the ground. For lawns, a simple measuring tip to determine how much water is applied to the lawn through your sprinkler is the tuna fish can test. Place several cans around the lawn before turning on the sprinklers. Run the sprinklers as set. Measure the amount of water in each can. Compare the depth to the length of time the sprinklers were on. Increase or decrease duration to get the amount you need. Rule of thumb: One inch of water will penetrate 5 inches in clay soil, 7 – 8 inches in loam and 12 inches in sandy soils.

We can all conserve water and still have lawns and gardens if we take the time to truly know how much water our systems emit. Run your system for longer time

periods and less often for optimal growing and conservation results. Hand water the potted plants and annual flower and vegetable garden beds. Soaker hoses are one of the best tools if you do not have a sprinkler system. Let it soak the soil overnight.

Proper watering will not only give you healthier plants, but lower energy bills and conserve water. Now that makes sense, doesn't it?

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