

Caring for your crop

Watering Tips



Water is a precious resource and so is your garden. This is a guide to help you water your garden more effectively so that plants can survive dry conditions and water supplies can be conserved.

How to Water your garden.

Plants have different water requirements at each stage of growth.

Seeds

Seeds need to be kept moist at all times. When the soil around the seed becomes dry, the seed may not germinate.

- Water seeds regularly. Use a watering can or spray bottle
- Ensure soil is moist but not water-logged.

Seedlings

- Seedlings need to be watered thoroughly and regularly until they develop a deeper root system.
- Care needs to be taken when watering, not to disturb roots.

Plants

Once plants have become established they don't need to be watered as often.

- Choose a regular watering day.
- Water plants thoroughly (ie, hold watering can over each plant and count to 5 slowly).
- Water at the base of each plant and not the leaves.
- Dig a small 'well' around the base of each plant so water pools around the stalk and soaks into the roots. This helps avoid run off.
- Water in the morning or later in the afternoon. Do not water in full daylight as the water will evaporate. Also, some plants such as lettuce wilts when watered in the hot hours of the day.
- Water requirements are weather dependent. Plants need more water in the summer when days are longer and generally hotter, than in winter when days are shorter and cooler. Check the moisture content by digging a finger length deep into the soil. Is the soil dry, moist or damp? It is important to dig down because sometimes the soil can be wet on top but actually be dry below the surface.
- Add compost to your garden bed. Compost increases the water holding capacity of the soil.
- Mulch. Mulching your garden beds will conserve water by reducing evaporation. Apply a thick layer of mulch (about 10cm) to the garden bed. Gently place mulch around the plants. Leave a space between the mulch and the base of

the plant to allow for watering and to give the plant room to grow. Mulch can be applied to all crops except root vegetables which grow underground. Mulching around root veggies may encourage pests such as the mealy bug to appear.

- Choose plants that have low water requirements. Consider planting indigenous foods that are drought tolerant.
- Consider sub-surface irrigation.

Sub-surface irrigation.

This is a cheap and effective way of watering your garden.

Some examples of sub-surface irrigation are clay pots, a hose with holes and plastic bottles with plastic nozzle attached turned up-side-down and inserted into the soil.

Benefits

- Reduce your water usage by up to 50-70%.
- You can measure and monitor the amount of water you are using each time on your garden.
- Plants are watered directly at root level and therefore water is not lost through evaporation and run off.
- Water is distributed to plants over a longer period of time.

Example of sub-surface irrigation:

Hose with holes

What you need.

- A drum with tap (eg a 20L bulk liquid container)
- Irrigation hosing



How to set it up

Divide the width of the garden bed into rows about 40cm apart. Dig a trench 15-20cm deep along each row that runs the length of the garden bed. Place the irrigation tubing in the trench and cover with soil. Leave room for one end of the hosing to poke out of the bed and attach it to the tap at the base of the plastic drum. Make sure the drum is slightly elevated to allow water to flow down into the hosing. It is best to install this system in between crops when the garden bed is lying fallow.

How to use it Fill drum with water. Water gradually seeps through permeable irrigation hosing.

