



# Watering 101

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A wide range of variables—from plant type and age to soil type and more—can influence when, how much and how to water. While there is no precise formula for watering landscape plants, the following can offer some guidance:

- Always check to see if plants actually need water. To see if the soil is moist, dig down a few inches with a long screw driver. If resistance is felt several inches down, it's time to water.
- Water in the morning or evening to conserve water (that said, watering when you have time is better than not watering at all).
- Water deeply. In general, a hose (not a sprinkler) running normally for 2 minutes will apply 10 gallons of water. If you are hand-watering 10 seconds per shrub, you're applying less than a gallon of water. To make sure water is being absorbed and not just sitting on the surface, water everything and then start over and do it all again.
- If you are using a sprinkler, calibrate it at the start of the season so you'll know how long it will need to run to apply an inch of water (directions can be found online).
- Test how deeply you have watered by using a soil probe or long screw driver an hour after watering. When you push the probe into the soil, it will go through moist soil easily and begin to give resistance when it hits dry soil.
- Sandy soil will need to be watered more frequently than clay soil.
- Trees are best watered by putting a hose on trickle or a sprinkler on low volume and leaving it there for several hours. Tree gators or five gallon buckets with holes also work as they slowly release water over a period of time.
- Apply 2-3 inches of organic mulch to conserve moisture, slow evaporation, cool the soil and add organic matter.
- Group plants with similar water needs together.
- Even native plants need to be watered frequently during the first several weeks after planting.
- Don't overwater. Automatic turf irrigation systems are most problematic in this regard. When soil is waterlogged, plant roots are starved of oxygen. Finding the balance between under-watering and overwatering can be tricky and, unfortunately, their symptoms are similar: leaves turn light green or yellow; leaves wilt; young shoots wilt. But using a soil probe (bullets above) should help determine soil moisture.
- Use a rain gauge and adjust watering accordingly. If you get 1 inch of rain in a week, you won't need to water.
- Most importantly, plant things that can survive long-term with minimal watering—like native plants!



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