

Drops of Wisdom

Ways to water:

One way to irrigate your lawn and garden is with a sprinkler, which is hooked to the end of a hose and showers specific areas with water. Sprinklers can be easily moved around to meet specific needs. there can be water waste when you use a circular spray to water a rectangle or square area. And on windy days, you may water your neighbor's lawn as much as your own. Garden centers and home-improvement stores have a sprinkler for every need and budget.

Soaker hoses:

Drip irrigation supplies water in small amounts over long periods of time, often several hours. Under low pressure, water seeps out through holes in hoses that are laid through the garden. Drip irrigation provides consistent moisture without flooding or runoff.

Soaker hoses reduce the rate of water loss by 60% compared to other watering methods because the water is absorbed almost immediately. There is no evaporation, no water blows over to your neighbor's, and water is not wasted on walkways and other non-garden areas. The length of time a soaker hose is left dripping depends on the plant material, soil type and weather.

Soaker hoses though very efficient, can't solve all watering problems. You need to know the rate at which water is released. That takes experience. Although a timer will allow you to soak your garden for two or three hours at a time, it doesn't take into account potential rainfall. a hose dripping on saturated soil will result in runoff.

Conserving water:

In addition to watering at the right time, mulching your garden helps make the best use of water. various materials can be used as mulch, which is placed over the soil to cool roots in summer and warm them in winter.

Mulch reduces evaporation of water from the soil surface and prevents the soil from crusting and compacting during rain and irrigation. Extension experts say falling water drops can pound the top 1/4 inch of soil, especially a clay soil, into a tight, bricklike mass that hinders air and water access to the roots.

Gardners may choose any plant material as mulch, as long as it's not diseased and is free of weed seed. When your flower bed or vegetable garden is established, add a 3-4 inch layer of mulch such as compost, hay, straw, cypress, pine bark or grass clippings. You will need to replace mulch as it washes away or decomposes.

The way you can now also affect your water needs. When conditions are hot and dry, you can reduce water needs by raising the mower blade 1/2 to 1 inch. Grass mowed at 2 or 3 inches maintains a deeper root system that grass mowed at 1 inch and requires less supplemental water. Dry-weather mowing heights recommended by lawn specialists are 3 inches for St. Augustine, bluegrass and tall fescue, and 2 inches for Bermuda and zoysia. A green and healthy lawn and garden are a celebration of summer. Water properly and you'll reap the rewards.