

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



June 28, 2025

Tips for Watering Plants in the Garden, Landscape, and Lawn

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With all the recent rain, how do I know when garden and landscape plants need water?

With the heat, some leaves look wilted. How much water do plants need and how often? When is the best time to water?

Water is taken up by the plant's roots, moves through the plant, and exits through the leaves during a process called transpiration. This is needed to move nutrients from the roots up into the leaves.

Plants that roll their leaves during heat and direct sunlight lose less water through transpiration. Plants with larger leaf areas lose more water than plants with smaller leaf areas.

Most plants will not grow if there is too much water in the soil. Roots need to remove oxygen from the soil to take up nutrients; therefore, excessive irrigation can be harmful. Plants will wilt and may die if the soil is too wet.

When do plants need water? First, check the current moisture level in the soil. Dig down 6 inches with a hand trowel and feel the soil. If it is damp to the touch, wait to water until it is

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not damp. If it is dry, water the plants. Using a screwdriver and pushing it down into the soil until it stops also indicates how far down the soil is moist.

Thorough, deep watering is much more effective for plants. This encourages plants to develop deep and well-dispersed root systems that provide good anchorage and help them obtain water more effectively during drought conditions.

Vegetables grow best receiving about 1 inch of water each week, taking into account the amount of rain received that week. Mulch, such as straw, helps to hold moisture around tomato plants and may not need as much water to keep them consistently moist.

Young or newly planted trees may need to be watered during the week if there is no rain, but don't overwater because this will encourage root diseases. Mulch around the tree will hold moisture. Older trees need very little watering in normal summers, but an occasional soaking would be best during a drought. It is best for large trees to go into dormancy during a drought so that they will get moisture from deeper in the ground and not be dependent on regular waterings.

Different approaches can be used when considering to water the lawn. One approach is to water as needed. The suggestion is to wait to water until footprints are left after walking on it. Then, water long enough to allow puddles to start forming on the surface. Another approach is to water when the soil is dry.

Another choice is to follow a rule-of-thumb that the turf needs 1 inch of water per week. If the water begins to runoff before 1 inch is applied, then divide the application during the week but avoid frequent light waterings. Skip a scheduled irrigation if one-quarter inch or more of

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rainfall occurs. Then return to the schedule. Concentrate on watering lawn areas most susceptible to drought injury, such as south and west-facing slopes, poor and shallow soil areas of the lawn, and steep sloping areas where rainfall tends not to penetrate.

If water is applied by a sprinkler, set an open-faced can in the area being watered. When 1 inch of water accumulates in the bottom of the can, 1 inch of water has been applied in areas covered by the sprinkler.

If a soaker hose or other type of drip irrigation is being used, make sure the top 6 inches of soil is wet. One inch of irrigation will usually wet the soil to a depth of approximately 6 inches. Drip irrigation is best to use under shrubs to prevent wetting the leaves.

Morning is the best time to water plants in the garden and landscape. Morning watering gives wet foliage a chance to dry rapidly, while evening watering tends to result in foliage that remains wet throughout the night. Foliage that stays wet for several hours has a greater chance of disease developing on the leaves.

Watering in the morning is also best for the lawn. The evaporative loss of water is lower at that time. In addition, the lawn benefits from the irrigation water, removing dew from the leaf surface, which reduces disease problems.

Watering in the evening, however, is better than no water at all. It is important to make sure that the water is directed at the plant base and away from the foliage. Watering during midday is not recommended because rapid evaporation of water from a plant's leaves may concentrate salts and burn the foliage.

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For more information about watering plants, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Consider entering your fruits, vegetables, cut flowers, and herbs from your garden in the Daviess County Lions Club Fair. Information about requirements for entries for youth and adult categories can be found in the fair book available at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office or online at <https://daviess.ca.uky.edu/dc-fair>. Entries need to be delivered to the East Exhibition building on Tuesday, July 15, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. at the fairgrounds in Philpot.

Upcoming Events:

Applications for the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program Class are available at the office. The application deadline is July 25. Classes are scheduled for Thursday mornings from 9:00 a.m. to noon, starting September 4 through December 18. Registration fee is \$100.

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