

Water-Wise: Water Use Guidelines

*Don't fight with your irrigation system –
become an irrigation “master”!*



Water deeply and infrequently.

Using good irrigation or watering techniques is key for maintaining plant health and conserving water. But most gardeners water too frequently and/or apply too little water at each irrigation. No matter what plant you're watering – lawns, perennials, shrubs, trees – applying water deeply promotes a more extensive root system and makes plants healthier overall.

What does “deep” mean?

The goal is to water to the bottom of the roots. Try to keep soil moist about ½ inch deeper than the deepest living roots of whatever plant you are irrigating. Generally, 6 inches for turf, 8-12 inches for ornamentals and vegetables, and 12-24 inches for trees and shrubs. Use the screwdriver method below to check depth of water penetration.

What does “infrequent” mean?

It varies by season of the year, based on rainfall, air temperature and soil type. Clay soil holds more water and stays moist longer, while sandy soil holds less water and will require more frequent irrigation. During cool periods with no rain, infrequent may mean one deep irrigation per month on clay soil. During hot periods, it may mean 2-4 deep irrigations per month. It all depends on how quickly the soil dries out and the root depth of the plants being irrigated.

Learn to recognize wilting in turf plants. Symptoms include:

- Bluish cast on the leaf blades
- Footprints left on the lawn after you walk through it
- Rolled or folded leaf blades

Screwdriver method for checking soil moisture.

- Use a long-bladed screwdriver or other metal probe and push it into the ground. It should move easily through moist soil and may even come out wet or muddy when moisture is very high.
- If it's difficult to push the screwdriver into the soil, moisture is low irrigation may be needed.
- With time and practice, you'll develop a feel for your soil and the resistance level which indicates watering is needed.

Soak and Cycle Technique

How do you get irrigation water to go deep and not waste water to runoff? Try the soak and cycle technique.

- Cycle through the irrigation zones once using a run time short enough to end irrigation before water starts to run off the landscape.
- Cycle through the zones a second time ***in the same day*** to push the water down deeper.

Watering Tips

- Avoid watering on windy days.
- Water early in the morning, 4-8 AM.
- Observe in-ground irrigation systems at least a couple times per season, looking for damaged, clogged, worn or misdirected heads. Make repairs as needed.
- Aerate turf in spring and/or fall to increase water infiltration capacity.