The WEST·HARTFORD·GARDEN·CLUB

West Hartford Garden Club

in collaboration with

West Hartford Public Library

GARDEN KNOW-HOW: WATERING

How much water does my garden need? How often should I water it? When should I water it? Many, even most, gardeners have pondered at least one of these questions. And while proper watering of your garden is not as complicated as it may seem at first glance, there are a few important steps you can follow to ensure your plants have the hydration they need to thrive.

Know Your Soil and Amend if Needed

The type of soil you have directly impacts how much water your plants receive. Loam—a combination of sand, silt, and clay particles—absorbs water readily and is able to store it for use by plants. Heavy clay soil often holds too much water—it drains poorly and compacts easily. On the other hand, water runs quickly through sandy soil, leading to rapid drainage that, in turn, requires more frequent watering. Adding organic matter mitigates the problems associated with both sandy and clay soil. Amending soil with compost or other organic matter is also the best long-term strategy for conserving water.

Learn the Art of Watering

Where and when you water your plants really does make a difference when it comes to plant health and water conservation. Be sure to apply water directly to the soil's surface. Why? Roots intake water, and plant leaves do not need to be watered. Wet leaves, in fact, only increase the probability that your plants will develop foliar (or leaf) diseases. Watering in the morning allows leaves to dry quickly (reducing risk of disease) and conserves water. Watering too shallowly and too frequently are among the most common mistakes gardeners make. Instead, water deeply and thoroughly—doing so encourages roots to push more deeply into the soil, where moisture levels are more consistent. That, of course, means you won't need to water your plants as often. Remember that newly planted seeds and young seedlings/transplants that have shallow, developing root systems will need

to be watered more frequently, whereas established plantings have deeper root systems and require less frequent watering.

Add Mulch

Mulching soil around the base of plants reduces moisture loss to evaporation, conserving soil moisture and reducing the time you will spend watering your plants.

Arrange Plants According to Their Needs

Grouping plants with similar watering needs in the garden will both decrease the time you spend watering and increase your ability to allocate water properly. Certain crops (such as onions and lettuce) as well as new plantings need shallow, more-frequent watering, whereas long-season plants like tomatoes need deeper, less-frequent watering.

Assess Soil Hydration

It's a good rule of thumb to water your garden when about half the available water in the soil is depleted. But how do you best determine when that is? Try digging down into the soil at least four inches and squeezing a handful of soil into a ball. When compressed in this manner, sandy soil should stick together slightly; loamy soil should form a loose ball; and clay soil should form a ball easily. If this doesn't happen in each case, it's time to water your garden.

(Retrieved from https://www.seedsavers.org/container-gardens) Seed Savers EXCHANGE

The WEST • HARTFORD GARDEN • CLUB ESTABLISHED 1931