

Dealing with the Drought



Proper Sprinkler Use

Most people supplement summer rainfall with sprinklers or irrigation hoses. Using a lawn or garden sprinkler isn't difficult, provided you follow a few simple guidelines.

Most lawns, flowers and vegetables require 1 inch of water throughout their growing season as long as temperatures remain below 90 degrees. Above that temperature, plants may require 2 inches of water per week, split into two applications of an inch each.

Shade trees might be able to get by with less water, less often. An inch or two every two weeks should be sufficient for a well-established tree. However, bearing fruit trees will need as much as 1 or 2 inches each week.

Sprinklers and irrigation hoses aren't calibrated for home use due to differences in water pressures, soil types and plant requirements. There is no way to state a correct number of "watering hours" for a lawn or garden.

But, you can calibrate your own sprinkler or hose to determine the amount of water flow over a specific time.

Sprinklers vary considerably. Patterns can be oval, rectangular or circular. Some sprinklers can shoot water 50 feet or more.

Sprinklers seldom discharge water uniformly. More water is usually released closer to the sprinkler. For that reason, it's best to overlap sprinkler patterns by a fourth.

To determine water flow rate, set the sprinkler in an open area and turn on the water. Place a small tin such as a tuna fish or cat food can approximately three quarters the distance from the sprinkler to the outer edge of water discharge. Most of these food cans are an inch high. When the can is full, check the time. This will give you a rough idea of how much time it takes your sprinkler to apply 1 inch of water.

It may take more than an hour or two to supply the recommended inch of water for turf, vegetables and flowers. However, you only need to time the flow rate once a year unless you change sprinklers or add more hose.

Slower sprinklers require a longer watering time; but on the plus side, water is absorbed slowly and not allowed to run off.

To measure drip irrigation or soaker hoses, allow them to soak for a half hour and then test the soil surrounding them. An inch of water will wet the soil an average of 6 to 15 inches, depending on soil type. If the soil isn't moist that deep, continue soaking.

A soil probe, steel rod or sharp, straight stick can be used to test the soil's moisture. Wet soil will cling to the probe or rod much like a moist cake.



Water in the early morning hours to reduce the chances of disease and evaporation.

Also, avoid over-watering plants. Roots need oxygen as much as water. They will start rotting if the soil is over-saturated.

A 1-inch thick container placed three quarters the distance from the sprinkler to the outer edge of water can help determine when an inch of water has been applied to the lawn or garden.



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