

Watering 101



Help your lawn thrive through the dog days of summer

Summer can take its toll on just about everyone. Even the most ardent fan of summer eventually grows weary of a heat wave, which can make something as simple as walking down the street seem exhausting.

While human beings have their ways of surviving summer heat, such survival can be more difficult for your lawn and garden. Certain grasses and plants thrive in hot weather. But when the dog days of summer arrive, even those grasses and plants built to withstand the summer sun can suffer. That's why watering takes on such importance in the summertime, when grasses and plants need water to avoid drying out and possibly even dying. The following are a few basic watering techniques to help homeowners keep their lawns going strong through the next summer swoon.

* Water when it's coolest. Watering when the temperatures are their lowest might seem counterintuitive. After all, homeowners might think their grass and gardens need water most when the temperature is at its highest. But watering when the temperature is cooler decreases evaporation, meaning your lawn

will get the water it needs and won't lose any to steamy conditions that cause evaporation. This is especially important when the amount of water you can use is limited by a drought restriction. You'll want to make sure the water you can use is actually going to the lawn and not evaporating as you're watering.

Watering in the early morning or in the evening, when the sun is not as strong and the temperatures are generally at their coolest, also reduces the likelihood that your grass will burn. That's because water attracts the sun, and a lawn that's wet in the middle of a hot day might attract too much sun and cause the lawn to burn.

* Recognize that not all plants are the same. How much water a plant needs and how frequently it needs to be watered largely depends on how deep its roots are. A plant with shallow roots won't need to be watered for long periods of time, but it will need to be watered frequently, whereas a deep-rooted plant like a tree or a shrub will need to be watered for long periods of time but not as frequently. Research the plants around your property to determine the depths

of their root systems and water accordingly.

* Lean on mulch to retain moisture. Mulch is often considered an aesthetically appealing addition to a landscape, but it serves a practical purpose as well. Mulch retains moisture during the hot summer months, reducing the need to water — a valuable benefit during a drought restriction. Mulch also makes it difficult for weeds to grow, which can keep homeowners from spending hot summer afternoons pulling weeds out of their gardens and flower beds.

* Strategically locate sprinklers. Sprinklers should be located so no water is ending up on the driveway or sidewalks around your property. Watering the concrete or asphalt is wasteful, and that's water that could be going toward your plants. When watering by hand, be sure all of the water is finding its way to plants and not on any walkways.

Successfully watering a lawn and garden during the dog days of summer can greatly reduce the risk of ending summer with a lawn full of bald spots and a garden filled with wilted plants.

Succulents for low-maintenance

Now is the time of year to focus on outdoor landscaping projects. One popular project involves redesigning the front yard or backyard to include an array of different flowers and foliage. While many people gravitate to the flashy and colorful annuals on display at nurseries and home centers, you may want to consider adding some succulents to your home landscape.

Succulent plants can be a boon to a homeowner without the time or resources to maintain plants. Succulents get their name from their primary function, which is drawing up and storing water. Succulents are able to thrive in arid conditions, and there are more than 300 different types, including some exotic species.

The advantages to planting succulents are many. Because they store water in their stems, roots and leaves, this reduces the number of times an owner must water them. Succulents can go several days between waterings. Succulents, like cacti, that have few if any leaves, are perhaps best at managing water because they lose little to evaporation through the foliage.

Succulents are particularly good to have in areas prone to arid temperatures or where water restrictions are often in place. They can be environmentally friendly because of their ability to conserve water. Succulents treat water as a precious resource, and their entire makeup is designed to minimize

consumption of water.

Because they thrive in sunlight, succulents can be the ideal plants to put in extremely sunny and hot locations. They will not wither and dry out due to extreme heat. For particularly dry areas of landscape or where soil is subpar, consider the placement of different varieties of succulents to create a varied and eye-catching display.

There are many other advantages to planting succulents; some of which include:

* Succulents offer contrasts in shape, texture and colors. With the many varieties, you're bound to find something interesting and different to add to the landscape.

* Whether you have ample acreage in the yard or simply some containers available for planting, succulents will thrive. They grow just as well in containers as they do in the ground.

* Succulents don't tend to require pruning or cutting back of the plant. With this in mind, you can expect them to grow large. Therefore, space the plants adequately to allow for growth.

* Succulents are perennials. So once you plant them, they should last for years and years without the hassle and expense you can expect from planting annuals every year.

* Indoor greenhouses or sunrooms can be another good place for succulents. They prefer not to get chilled, which makes a controlled environment advantageous.

When considering a spot for your succulents, choose areas that get plenty of sun. Think about pruning back or removing trees that would create too much shade on the succulents. Space the succulents widely apart — more so than you would with other plants — to allow them to spread. Pebbles or gravel make good mulching material around succulents so that drainage will be adequate. It will also set the succulents apart from other plants by contextualizing them in your garden.

Visit a gardening center or home improvement store to learn more about the myriad types of succulents that can add beauty to most gardens.

Gardening in any sized space

Believe you need an acre of property to start gardening? Think again. Individuals can grow their own patch of greenery in just about any space they have on hand.

When it comes time to getting your hands dirty, it doesn't matter if there are rolling hills or a single container filled with soil on which to plant. Although many gardening professionals present plans for larger-scale gardens, it's possible to create smaller-scale options that require a great deal less maintenance and upkeep.

To get started, homeowners or apartment dwellers need to first look at the space they have. Perhaps this is a few flower pots or a small square of exposed dirt in an otherwise concrete jungle. Others may have an expansive backyard in which to toil in the soil. Either way, knowing what you have to work with can help home gardeners map out a more successful plan of action.

Next, it's important to consider the climate and the soil conditions. Soil can be amended to a point, but plants that require a lot of water may not do well in an area plagued by drought.

Color is another thing to consider. Gardeners with smaller spaces may want to think about keeping gardens mainly monochromatic, which will look more cohesive. Cool-colored flowers and plants will help make a garden look larger. Warm-colored flowers will add impact and could create a cozier feel.

Hanging baskets and raised containers can add height and free up more floor space for gardens. They're particularly helpful when space is at a premium. Keep in mind that baskets and containers tend to dry out easily, so using peat moss, vermiculite and other products that tend to hold onto water will help keep the soil moist. These containers also may need to be watered more frequently.

Containers also can be used to plant small trees or shrubs. Use them for vegetable plants as well. The advantage to containers is they can be moved elsewhere if a plant is not thriving in a particular area.

People who have an extremely space with which to work may be limited to a few flower pots in the window, but they can easily grow herbs or annual flowers.

Those who have a large space may want to consider breaking the landscape down into smaller quadrants; otherwise, the garden can seem un-



Gardening is a rewarding hobby that can be done on a small or large scale.

ruly. Use hardscape materials, such as mulch, rocks, boulders, and slate to break up the greenery (and also cut down on items that need pruning and watering).

Individuals who don't know where to start can page through

gardening magazines for ideas. Alternatively, they can consult with an area landscaper to find out which plants will do well.





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