

## **Proper watering is critical to the success of your plants.**

Too much water can be as harmful to your plants as not enough. Many people don't realize that roots of plants require oxygen. In between soil particles are tiny openings or spaces. In an ideal situation, these gaps should be filled with water and then alternately filled with air. If the spaces are filled with water all the time, there is no oxygen getting to the roots. If there is air between the spaces all the time, there is no water getting into the roots. The oxygen is needed to create the energy the plant uses to take up the water. It is easy to think that because a plant wilts, it needs more water. This is not always the case. If a plant is continually wet, the lack of oxygen to the roots will prevent the plant from using the water available. The roots begin to rot and the plant dies.

This is seen most often with houseplants in the winter when days are short and the weather is overcast. A houseplant can easily go 1 -2 weeks between watering during a NW Montana winter. The plant is essentially dormant.

In the spring, newly planted urns, window boxes and buckets of flowers often have a good deal of extra soil. This soil will hold surplus water. This means that your flowers or vegetables may only need watering every few days. By mid-summer, when the roots have filled the container, these same plants may need water twice a day.

There are some tips to helping keep your roots happy and healthy. The best way to see if your plant needs water is to lift the container. Feel the weight of it when it is wet and then when it is dry. Hot weather can also make a plant wilt. Don't be fooled into thinking it needs more water on the root system. Check it first.

Make sure your plants are always in containers that have a drainage hole in the bottom. When you water, water thoroughly. If it is an outdoor planter, wash the water through with a hose to keep fertilizer salts from building up. Then let the planter dry out. Don't put just a little bit of water on every day. Don't have more than two inches of extra soil around the roots of your indoor plants. Too big of a container holds more water than the plant can use. You can get away with extra soil on outdoor planters as long as you are conservative with the water early in the season. During a rainy spring, you may actually want to tent your planters to keep excess water from drowning your plants.

By mid-summer, many planters and container beds need watering at least once a day. Blossom end rot on tomatoes and potato scab are linked to inconsistent watering. If your planters get overly dry while you are away at work during the day in the hot sun, you may want to consider putting a timer on an irrigation system. While I'm talking about watering, don't water your garden using an overhead sprinkler. Use a drip or soaker hose. Overhead watering spreads disease in the garden, especially mildews and fungus.

Proper watering goes a long way to ensuring a successful relationship with plants. Being overly liberal with water is as detrimental as overly conservative. Eventually, most gardeners will be able to look at their plants and see if they need water by looking at the color of the foliage and/or very slight flagging. Best of luck and keep on growing ☺

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