



# How-To: **WATERING**

*Gardens need regular watering to thrive. Learn how and when to water for the best growth and production.*



**WATERING NEWLY PLANTED SEEDLINGS AT BRADDOCK FARMS**



**USING A HOSE WITH A GENTLE NOZZLE TO WATER RAISED BEDS**

## **DO YOU NEED TO WATER?**

Vegetable gardens need an average of one inch per week of water for optimal production. This water can come from rain, irrigation, or hand watering. Plants without adequate water are less productive and healthy, and are more susceptible to pest and disease pressure.

Depending on the recent amount of rain, it may or may not be important to water the garden. To check the soil for moisture, dig an inch or two into the soil and scoop up a small handful. Squeeze it in your fist to make a ball, then open your fingers. If the soil stays in a ball, no watering is needed. If it crumbles or falls apart easily, it's time to water! Please note that container gardens generally require daily watering, unless the soil is already damp.

## **HOW TO WATER**

### **CHOOSE A TIME**

The best time to water the garden is in the morning, to discourage fungal diseases that can develop when water sits on leaves overnight. Watering during the middle of the day can waste water through evaporation. However, watering the garden if it needs it is more important than watering at the very best time of day.

If you have work to do in the garden, like weeding, harvesting, or trellising, save watering for last, as brushing against wet leaves can spread disease.

### **GATHER TOOLS**

Depending on the size of your garden, choose a hose, watering can, or irrigation system. Hoses fitted with gentle nozzles and irrigation systems work well for medium to large gardens. Irrigation systems that connect to a city water supply are commercially available, or look for a low-flow type that works with a rain barrel. Drip irrigation systems use the least water, since they deliver it right to the plants' roots. Irrigation systems can also be hooked up to a timer, so they can do the watering if you are away. A watering can is adequate for most containers and small gardens.

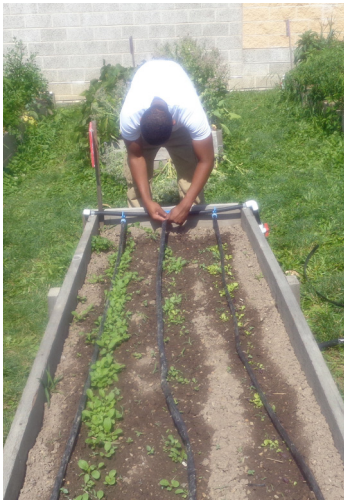
### **WATER**

When watering with a hose or watering can, wet the soil with a gentle first coat, to "prime" it. With this first application, don't allow the water to pool. When the first watering has soaked in completely, return to your starting point and water again, thoroughly. When a pool of water sits on the soil surface, move on, until the whole garden is well-watered.

It's much better for a garden to receive a long drink than a little bit of water every day. Imagine the roots of your crops growing toward water. If there is never



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DRIP IRRIGATION IN A RAISED BED



WATERING A TREE AFTER PLANTING

enough water to sink deep into the soil, the roots will stay near the soil surface, making the plant vulnerable to drought and heat stress. If the water percolates deep into the soil it will encourage roots downward, which makes for a more stable and drought-hardy plant.

## TIPS

- Because of their immature roots, seedlings and newly sprouted plants need more regular watering than established plants. Be sure to check young plants every day or two and give them a good soaking if the soil is dry.
- Collected rainwater can be used to water the garden. However, because this rainwater can house bacteria and other unknown substances picked up from the roof, don't use collected rainwater to water any part of the plant that you intend to eat. Also, never use collected rainwater to clean or process produce.
- Mulching the garden conserves soil moisture and reduces the need for watering.
- It is possible to overwater the garden. Some plants like "wet feet," but most of them are not vegetables and fruits. Unless you are growing a plant that is indigenous to a swamp, be careful not to create one in your garden! Plants need porosity in the soil, so their roots don't drown. Ironically, one indication of overwatering is wilting. So, check the soil before watering a wilted plant.