

Water! Water! Water!



Tips On Watering Your Landscape

Adapted from *The Columbus Landscape Association*

Newly planted landscapes need a **bare minimum** of one inch of water per week if the plant material is going to thrive and grow. A little more than an inch won't hurt most plants and is ideal for new landscapes. Established landscape plants need less water. A watering schedule for both new and established landscape plants is included in this tip sheet.

The hot, dry periods that often occur in Ohio weather patterns can present a real challenge to anyone who is trying to keep trees, shrubs, flowers, and lawns alive and healthy. Here are some proven ways to help outdoor plants (new and established) grow and stay healthy during periods of time when there is little or no natural rainfall.

- Add a two-inch thick layer of mulch on top of the soil around trees and shrubs and a one-inch layer of mulch around ground covers, flowers, and vegetables. (Your newly installed landscape will likely already be mulched). Mulching is especially vital for new plantings. Do **NOT** spread more than 2 inches of mulch around plants and **NEVER** spread mulch against the trunks of trees and shrubs as it will rot the bark and allow a path for disease into plant! Shredded bark is the best kind of mulch for trees, shrubs, ground covers, and flowers but aged wood chips, leaves, straw, or similar organic materials will also work. Leaves or straw are good mulches for vegetables. Mulching is very beneficial to plants because evaporation of water from the soil is greatly reduced, the soil stays cooler, and competition from weeds is reduced. One direct result of a good mulch is the significant reduction in the amount of supplemental water that plants need during hot, dry periods. Mulches are most beneficial when applied at planting time. with more being

added as needed to maintain the desired thickness. Remember, spreading too much mulch, more than 2 inches can be detrimental to your plants and actually cause the plants to starve for moisture rather than help the plant retain it. Heavy, thick layers of mulch sometimes become a colonization hotbed for certain fungi which cause the mulch to harden and resist the absorption of water. So, mulching one to two inches is always best.

- Most landscape plants need a minimum of 1 inch of water per week. Check the moisture in the soil under plants at least 3 times a week whenever the natural rainfall might be inadequate. Don't guess or make assumptions about soil moisture. Plants, especially newly installed ones, will fail if not watered properly while they are establishing root systems. The only sure way to check soil moisture is to put your hand down into the soil under the mulch (use a tool to dig a small hole if you need to) and feel the soil. If the soil is sticky and it feels wet or moist, then there is enough water in the soil. If the soil is powdery and it feels dry, then water needs to be added as soon as possible.

Watering Schedule for New Landscapes: Water plants wisely when soil moisture is found to be inadequate. Applying one to one and a half inches of water per week is a good rule of thumb! In general, wise watering for new landscapes mean:

- a) Soaking the soil deep down (as far as the plant roots go) and then waiting again until the soil is again dry or nearly dry. This method encourages plants to grow more vigorous, deeper roots, which will tolerate dry spells better than plants with shallow roots. To accomplish this, water your plants every other day or at least three days a week. (See c below)
- b) In hot weather, water early in the morning or in the evening when the temperature is cooler; this method will conserve water because less water will be lost to evaporation and more will soak into the ground.
- c) Use a small sprinkler or slow-running hose that gets moved to several places when watering individual trees or shrubs. Use larger sprinklers or sprinkler systems when watering planting areas with many plants or on lawns. Use a pie pan or coffee can - when 1 inch of water has been delivered to plants, empty the pan or can, move the sprinkler and can to a new location in the

planting bed and water that area until an inch of water has collected in the pan. It is best to water the plants every 2 to 3 days depending on air temperature and available sunlight. Therefore, you may want to only apply a third of an inch or more when you water. By the third watering of the week, you will have delivered one to one and a half inches to the plants. Water more frequently when air temps are above 85 degrees or if the plants are in full sunlight all day.

- d) Adjust the water flow so that little or no water runs off the surface of the area in order to eliminate waste.
- e) Make sure that the water only goes on the plants that need it.
- f) Giving a little more than one inch of water per week will not hurt your plants but over watering can be lethal to plants. Unfortunately, over watering *mimics* under watering. Many homeowners have killed landscape plants because the plant was wilting and appeared to be starving for water. In reality, over watering “suffocates” the plant and prevents oxygen from entering the roots. The result is a plant which wilts and looks exactly like a plant which needs water. This is a little trick from Mother Nature! If you follow the watering schedule above you should not have any problems. Please call **A Guy & His Dog Landscaping** if you have questions or are unsure of this method. It is much better to call us with any watering questions rather than wait until a plant has suffered drought injury.

Watering Schedule for Established Landscapes:

In hot dry weather and/or during restricted water use periods, the plants that are the most important ones to water are newly seeded or sodded lawns (for the first two to four weeks), and then anything else that has been planted recently; next most important are established trees, shrubs, ground covers, annual and perennial flowers, and vegetables; established lawns are least important because grass plants can survive long dry periods by going dormant (brown).

In addition to checking soil moisture by feel, one way to judge how much water to apply is to measure both the natural rainfall and supplemental water by using a rain gauge under sprinklers and using

the guidelines below.

Plant watering guidelines for established trees and shrubs:

These recommendations are generally required for each 1" of tree caliper, or per 3' of shrub height.

Up to 65 degrees: Optimum-1/2" per week, Moderate-1/2" every 2 weeks, Minimum-1/2" per month.

65 - 85 degrees: Optimum-3/4" per week, Moderate-3/4" every 2 weeks, Minimum-3/4" per month.

Over 85 degrees: Optimum-1" per week, Moderate-1" every 2 weeks, Minimum-1" per month

Ground Cover Plantings, Annual Flowers, Perennial Flowers, and Vegetables:

Apply 1/2" twice a week on new plantings until plants are well rooted (2-3 weeks). Apply 1/2" of water to established plantings whenever the soil checks dry.

Newly Seeded Lawns:

Water to keep the seedbed moist (up to three times a day) for at least three weeks until the grass is four inches high, then reduce watering to established lawns rates.

Newly Sodded Lawns:

Soak new sod immediately after it is laid. Then water every day for the first two weeks, and after that reduce watering to established lawn rates.

Established Lawn Areas:

Optimum watering: The optimum amount of water for ideal turf growth is the amount that it takes to keep the entire root zone (usually 8-12") moist (not wet).

Up to 65 degrees: 1/2" of water per week, including natural rainfall.

65 to 85 degrees: 1" per week.

85 degrees or more: 1-1/2" - 2" per week.

Less than optimum watering: When lawn watering is restricted but still allowed on a limited basis:

Up to 65 degrees: up to 1/4" of water per week, including natural rainfall.

65 to 85 degrees: 1/2 - 3/4" per week.

85 degrees or more: 1" per week.