



Old Chesterton Allotment Society

(Old Chesterton Allotment Society Limited. Mutuals Reg. No. 9773R)

Registered Office: 20A Pakenham Close, Cambridge CB4 1PW

OCAS Watering advice

April 2021

Please may we remind all that only watering cans should be used to collect water from the troughs. This is to reduce spillage and waste. It is perfectly acceptable to fill multiple watering cans and wheel them in your wheelbarrow. Try to keep the spout tilting up so that you are not watering the path, and recover any water that spills into your barrow into a can to use it properly on your site.

Below are eight golden rules for watering effectively, both to conserve water and to save you a lot of unnecessary work (both watering and weeding).

8 golden rules for watering:

No. 1: Maintain good sub-soil moisture levels

- Dig in or mulch with plenty of organic matter; this will help to retain moisture in the soil.
- Apply mulches when the soil is warm and moist, this will reduce water loss due to evaporation and also suppress weeds.
- Weeds compete for moisture and nutrients in the soil so keep weeds down by weeding or hoeing regularly
- Most plants depend on even moisture. However, slight drying out before watering promotes root growth of the plants.
- A dry soil surface does not necessarily mean water is needed.
- Do not water between 12noon and 5pm during late spring and summer. You will waste a significant amount of water through evaporation.

No. 2: Water less often, but thoroughly

- In the flower bed, one to two watering sessions per week are usually sufficient: better to water less often but with plenty of water rather than a little water often. In the vegetable garden more watering may be required as most vegetables are mainly water. Two or three thorough watering sessions a week for vegetables will probably suffice. Keep an eye on your benchmark plants to see if further watering might be needed.
- Big, leafy plants such as squashes and cucumbers lose moisture quickly, and are often the first on the plot to wilt. Keep a beady eye on these plants as they will be the first indicators that you haven't watered enough.
- Do remember that very young plants and those recently transplanted may require small amounts of watering daily until they become established. Plants in containers may also require more frequent watering than those in the open plot.

No. 3: Water late in the evening or early in the morning

- When you water cooled soil in the evening or at night, less water evaporates than it would on hot soil during the day. And the plants can sufficiently supply themselves with water before the next day's heat. Some plants, such as sweetcorn, only open their leaf pores at

night to take in carbon dioxide and make starch. For these plants watering in the evening makes particularly good sense.

No. 4: Keep leaves dry to avoid diseases

- Wet leaves become diseased leaves. Leaves that are made wet in the sun develop slight burn marks (magnifying-glass effect of the water droplets). Kept wet overnight, leaf-mould diseases may result. Wet leaves on tomato, pepper and potato plants encourage late blight.

No. 5: Ensure the water reaches the roots

- Apply gradually to allow water to fully penetrate the soil without run-off.
- Apply enough water at each watering for it to sink into the soil and encourage the plant roots to grow downwards to seek water between watering sessions. Too-low water quantities often only cover the upper soil.
- Water evenly around the plant for a balanced well-developed root system.

No. 6: Make your watering as efficient as possible saving time and water itself.

- Consider using water-saving irrigation methods e.g. drip irrigation. If you have any spare large plastic pots you can bury them upright next to your plant and fill with water. The pot will help focus where the water is going, slowly trickling down through the bottom. This keeps the water in and around the plant, so the roots can gently feed.
- You can also use large plastic bottles cut in half. Bury the top half head down next to the plant.

No. 7: Avoid waterlogging

- Waterlogging displaces the breathing air of the roots out of the soil – the root cells drown without oxygen.

No. 8: Get your timing right

- Timing may require a little research, but individual crops have particular watering needs. There are times when it is not advisable to water heavily, for example young pea and bean plants as this can encourage too much leaf growth.
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