waterwise Queensland

Department of Environment and Resource Management

Watering your garden

While all gardens need water to survive, careful planning and good gardening habits can reduce your garden's water needs. Be sure to check the water restrictions in your local area before watering your garden.

Garden conditions

The amount of water your garden needs depends on many factors:

- **Plant variety**—there is a range of native and exotic plants that look great and thrive in dry conditions. Speak to your local nursery for recommendations on which plants suit your environment.
- **Soil type, depth and drainage**—you need to water more frequently if you have a sandy soil, or less frequently if you have clay. Whatever your soil type, enhance its capacity to store water by regularly adding plenty of organic matter such as compost, mulch and manures.
- **Slope of the garden**—consider your garden's slope when watering. Plants in higher positions will generally need more frequent watering; those lower down will benefit from run-off or seepage through the soil profile.
- **Presence of shade**—shade from trees or structures protects plants from direct sunlight, reducing evaporative losses and helping to create a cooler environment. Strategic placement of your garden shed, or shade-giving trees, can make a big difference.
- **Exposure to wind**—trees and shrubs create protection from winds, reducing air flow and helping to reduce evaporation. Consider planting windbreaks if your garden is exposed to strong winds.
- **Rainfall amount and frequency**—look at the pattern of rainfall in your area. If you get only light falls of less than 5 millimetres, these may have limited benefit in replenishing the soil, so you will still need to water. Regular storm activity may negate the need for watering.
- **Rainfall seasonality**—plant demand for water may be three to five times higher in summer than in winter. If your rainfall occurs mostly in summer, this is an advantage for your plants and your watering needs.

Saving water

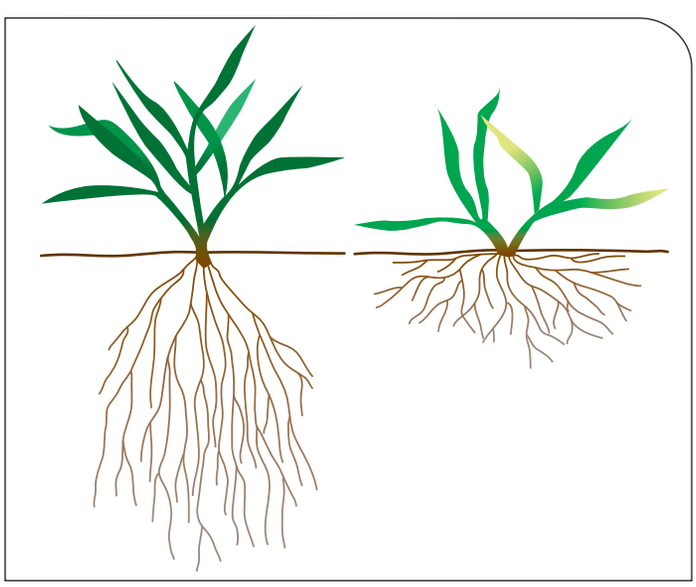
By following a few simple guidelines, you can save water and enjoy a sustainable, water-efficient garden.

Water only when your garden needs it

Don't over-water your garden. Waterlogged soil encourages the growth of bacteria and fungi, which cause disease to plants.

Water deeply to encourage deep root growth

Each time you water, be sure to apply enough water to penetrate the root zone. Frequent shallow watering causes the plants to grow shallow roots, leaving the plant more susceptible to drought and to certain diseases.



Plants with deeper roots are able to draw more moisture from the soil

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Let the rain do your work for you

Watch the weather. Rainfall is a free and easy way to water your garden.

Hints

- » Water by hand with a can or trigger nozzle, when water restrictions in your local area allow. It's one of the best ways to make sure that your plants get just the right amount of water.
- » Direct downpipes and other run-off towards shrubs and trees, or collect and use for your garden.
- » Look for wilting or leaf curling—these signs indicate that it's time to water.
- » Water the plants' roots, not the flowers and leaves.
- » Use a rain gauge to determine how much rain you receive, and then water again only if needed.

Soil types

The amount of water your soil can hold is influenced by your soil type. In general, clay soils can hold more water than sandy soils. Whatever your soil type, adding more organic matter will boost the water-holding capacity. Applying wetting agents may also help your soil to absorb water.

To test your soil type, take a handful of soil from different areas and depths in your garden, removing any of the larger particles. Add a small amount of water to the soil and start kneading it into a ball.

Sandy soils

Sandy soil particles feel gritty and crumbly, and they won't form a ball. Sandy soil is light-coloured and low in nutrients; water drains away easily and the soil dries out quickly in hot weather. However, they are well-aerated and easy to cultivate. When the soil is moist but not wet, dig to loosen the top 300 millimetres and add plenty of organic matter such as compost, mulch or manure, and dig in well. You will need to add more organic matter on a regular basis.

Clay soils

Clay soil is smoother and more nutrient-rich than a sandy soil. It forms a ball easily and has the consistency of plasticine. It has fine, dense particles that stop water soaking in easily, and becomes hard and even more water-resistant in hot weather. To break up clay soils, apply 500 grams of gypsum or dolomite per square metre and dig this in well. This improves soil structure and allows water and nutrients to penetrate the soil.

Loams

Loam soil forms a ball but will crumble if broken. It is ideal for most plants, as it has good nutrient levels, and holds and drains water well. Loam includes all soil types in between sandy and clay soils. Loams can be improved and maintained by adding organic matter such as compost, mulch and manures on a regular basis.

Improving your soil

At least once each year, dig in plenty of organic material such as compost, mulch or manure. After you have added organic matter, add a layer of organic mulch over the top. This will gradually break down and improve soil structure. Replenish the mulch layer regularly to maintain a minimum thickness of around 35 millimetres.

More information

For more information about being waterwise around your home, visit the Department of Environment and Resource Management website ‹www.derm.qld.gov.au/waterwise›.

For more information about saving water in your local area, contact Wide Bay Water Corporation on 1300 808 888 or visit ‹www.widebaywater.qld.gov.au›.