

When to Water

To many people, one of the most enjoyable aspects of home gardening is watering. It is also very important. However, many gardening problems, such as poor yield, poor quality, poor fertility, bitter fruit, sunscald, disease problems and a dozen other things, can be related to poor or improper watering techniques. Gardening is a form of relaxation, so it is not unusual for many gardens to be watered two, three or more times a week. This can result in poor root development. Light, frequent waterings cause a concentration of roots in the top inch or two of soil. Undeveloped root systems do not pose any serious problem early in the season when the plants are relatively young and sufficient moisture is available. But, as the season progresses and moisture becomes scarce, the limited root system needs more frequent watering. Consequently, you may need to water several times a week just to keep the plants from wilting severely. This problem can be prevented by adequate early and mid-season watering.

Determine when to water the garden by examining the soil, not the plants. If the soil surface appears dry, scratch the surface to a depth of about an inch to determine if moisture is present. If the soil appears relatively dry, watering is necessary. If sufficient moisture is available an inch beneath the surface, wait a couple of days before watering. Another consideration is the type of soil in your garden. Obviously a light, sandy soil that drains quickly requires more frequent watering than a heavy soil which holds water. Therefore, check sandy soil more often than heavy clay soil.

How much water should you apply? Soak garden soil to a depth of at least 6 inches. If moisture is available at this depth, adequate moisture has been applied. After doing this several times, you learn by experience when adequate water has been applied. An inch or two of water applied once a week usually is sufficient for most vegetable gardens in Texas.¶