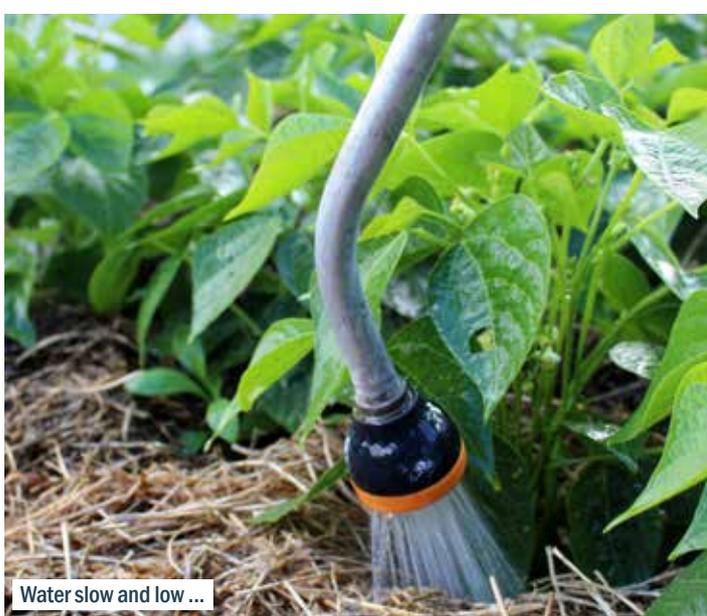


— THE DIGGERS CLUB —

THE *Secret* TO WATERING SUCCESS



... not fast and high



Water slow and low ...

WATERING IS A SKILL

Most people think of watering in the wrong way. This activity is often used as a method of relaxation where gardeners wander around the garden on a hot night with a watering wand in one hand and a chilled beverage in the other, flinging water around haphazardly, watching it glisten in the fading light. Yes, it is a great way to relax from a tough day, but this is not the best way to water.

Unfortunately, this method is decidedly ineffective and promotes fungal attack, especially when done in the evening.

A question often asked of new recruits in a nursery is: “Do you know how to water?”

This question is often met with a blank look as if they had just been asked if they can tie their own shoelaces!

Let’s set the record straight - not everyone knows how to water!

WATERING SLOW AND LOW

Watering takes time. Whether by hand or by irrigation system, water penetrates the soil or pot best at low volumes over a longer time and should be applied as close as possible to the roots.

A hose turned on full pelt blasted at your plants and the soil is mainly wasted. It runs off, often on to paths or down the side of raised beds, planters and pots, and never actually makes it to the roots. Take your time - slow and low please.

SEEDS NEED WATER TOO

Just because you can’t see them, doesn’t mean that seeds don’t have water needs. It may seem obvious but seeds are baby plants.

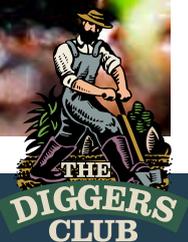
A plant is at its most vulnerable in the period from imbibing its first drink till the formation of leaves and roots.

Do not let that tray of soil or seed bed dry out.

This is undoubtedly the single biggest cause for plant failure from seed. Would you let a newborn baby miss a feeding?



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WHEN WATERING, SOILS AIN'T SOILS

There is danger in 'one size fits all' watering maxims. Probably the most misunderstood mantra is that you should always apply water in long deep soaking once a week and avoid shallow frequent watering.

This really depends on your soil. For clay and loam this works well, but when it comes to sandy soil you need to break this rule - especially if you are growing shallow-rooted perennials.

The aim of watering is to get the water to the root zone. In sandy soils, with little water-holding capacity, water percolates so quickly through the profile. Here the deep soak actually wastes water as it flows away beyond the root zone. At Heronswood, with its sandy soil and exposed position, we found the same volume of water applied over shorter intervals works best for our perennials, so it's not a one size fits all (see diagram right).

AVOID YO-YO WATERING

Life is busy and erratic. We tend to water when we can. Sometimes we neglect our plants, then to make up for this period of neglect we flood them, to show how much we care.

Consistency is the key to success when watering fruiting plants. A little water stress can bring on fruiting, but once fruit sets, it's important to maintain soil moisture to ensure the continued production of quality fruit. Inconsistent watering can lead to Blossom End Rot in tomatoes (pictured) and fruit splitting. It is also usually the cause of the perennial problem of citrus in containers getting masses of tiny fruit that invariably drop off without even a gin and tonic's slice worth to show for it.

PRECIPITATION IS ONLY HALF THE STORY

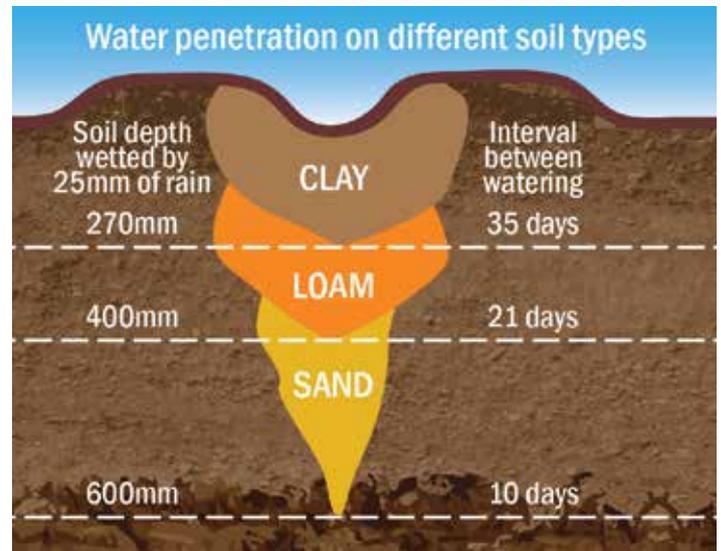
Don't forget to reduce evaporation!

In Australia, the real watering challenge is not so much low rainfall, but incredibly high evaporation rates caused by summer heat. The secret way of 'watering' your garden is by reducing evaporation from the soil.

Insulating the soil is the first step. Applying mulch in spring conserves winter rainfall and reduces summer evaporation. Don't forget dense planting also shelters the soil. Likewise, well designed windbreaks and hedging create micro-climates and provide shelter from wind and intense heat.

Ground covers are living mulch.

They reduce weeds, which are thirsty unwanted plants, and reduce evaporation by covering the soil.



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