

WATERING PLANTS IN CONTAINERS

Why does a plant need water? Mainly for two things – photosynthesis, and nutrients

Photosynthesis is what plants do to create their food, and water is critical to this process. Water enters a plant's stem and travels up to its leaves, which is where photosynthesis actually takes place. Once in the leaves water evaporates, as the plant exchanges water for carbon dioxide.

Water is a necessary conduit for the transfer of nutrients from the soil and into the root system. Without it, the plant could not absorb the soil's nutrients.

How to water a plant:

Check moisture levels - Before watering plants, check to see if your plant really needs it - the top of the soil can look and feel dry, even though just below the soil line it is still moist. Stick your finger into the soil. If it feels dry at your fingertip, your plants need water. Look at the soil, if you can – it can indicate if the soil needs water – if it's a lighter brown, it could be dry. Lift up the pot – if it's light, the plant needs water. Observe the plant – is it wilting, even a little bit? Did it rain recently? Is it particularly hot, dry, or windy? All these can affect how much water a plant needs. In the heat of July and August, it's safe to assume that a pot in full sun might need to be watered once a day, maybe more if it's a small pot, or a hanging basket. But, it's always best to check.

Water deeply - The most important thing when watering plants is to give them a good, long drink - optimally, until water runs out the hole in the bottom of your container. You do this because, depending on the size of your pot, many of the plant's roots will be down towards the bottom and you want them to be able to get water too, and the only way you know that the water is getting all the way to the bottom is if it runs out. It will also encourage roots to grow down toward the bottom of the pot, which is better for plants. You might need to water twice, ideally about an hour apart, if the soil is very dry – once to hydrate the soil, once to provide water for the plant.

Water the soil, not the leaves – leaves don't absorb moisture. Make sure the water covers the whole soil surface, moving the wand head around to cover it all. Soak the soil, not the plant. For larger shrubs and trees, water each plant for at least 10 seconds. Water slowly, so the water soaks in, and doesn't run down the side of the pot.

Water in the morning, if at all possible. Watering at night encourages fungus and disease. But if the plant is really dry, water anyway. Water stress is a worse problem.

Know Your Plants - Most plants prefer to live in moist soil--not wet and soggy, just damp. Fortunately with modern potting mixes, which are designed for good drainage, this is easier than it used to be. However, different plants have very different moisture needs. Some plants like to be dry, some like to be a bit dry between waterings and then there are those which will drop all their buds and leaves if they're not happy. However, as a rule of thumb, flowering annuals don't like to get too dry. Succulents like to be a bit dry and vegetables - particularly those that are juicy (tomatoes, cucumbers, melons) - like to be kept moist and need a huge amount of water. Some herbs (rosemary, thyme, oregano, cilantro) like to dry a little between watering and the flavor will be stronger if they do. Some herbs like (parsley, dill, basil, chives) like more moisture.