



HOW TO Water your garden effectively

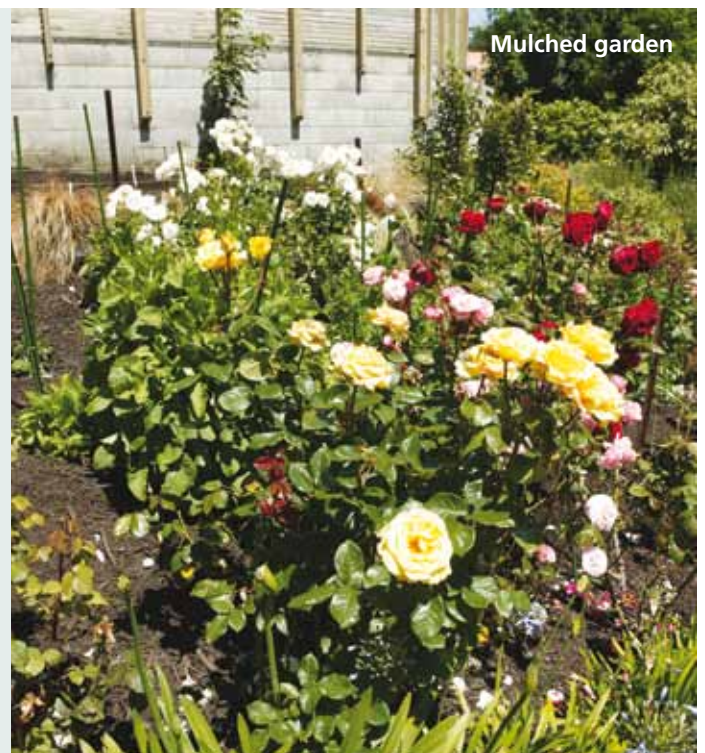
Our summer water supply

During periods of hot weather, water use rises dramatically as we sprinkle it on our gardens. In a dry summer, Greater Wellington may struggle to meet this extra demand.

Supplying water is expensive, particularly when new infrastructure is needed to provide for growing demand. Building major new water supply assets could be put off if summer water use can be held at current levels.

Water supply to Lower Hutt, Porirua, Upper Hutt and Wellington varies from around 145 million litres daily in winter to over 200 million litres per day during a dry summer.

Garden watering is the single biggest factor behind rising water use during summer. The good news is that effective watering does not need great quantities of water – you simply have to make good use of it.



Mulched garden



Test, target, time and mulch

The most effective way to promote healthy plant growth is to use water sparingly and target irrigation directly to the soil. Regular weeding, to reduce competition for water, and mulch, to reduce water loss from evaporation, are also necessary. Mulch helps to keep soil permeable, so water can penetrate. This is particularly important on sloping ground. See our *How to: Mulch your garden* leaflet for more information.

Test

Check that the soil is dry several centimetres below the surface before you water, or watch your plants to see if they are wilting. If the soil is moist and the plants look healthy, you won't need to water.

Target

Only water plants, not paths and driveways, and give them just enough water to wet the soil to about 10cm deep, usually half an hour of constant spray (but longer if you are using a seep hose). Applying water gently and at ground level is most effective. The harder the water hits the soil, the more wasteful and damaging to the soil it's likely to be.



Time

Watering in the evening or early morning helps minimise the effects of evaporation. Evaporation is greatest when water is sprayed and lowest when it seeps or drips. Avoid spraying or sprinkling in windy conditions as much of the water will be blown away. Set a timer for about half an hour and check after watering to confirm that the soil is wet to 10cm.

You may need to water every second day if the weather is hot and breezy, otherwise once or twice a week should be enough.

On sandy soils, there is little sideways spreading of water from drippers or seep hoses so space watering lines closer together. Approximate spacing: sand 1 metre (m), loam 1.7m, clay 2m.

The right equipment will save you water, time and money. What will suit you best? See our *How to: Choose the right irrigation equipment for your garden* leaflet for advice on what to buy.



Stick to the rules

Unless you are watering by hand, watering is typically limited to two hours in the early morning or evening every second day. For details, contact your local council.

Water in the vegetable garden

Group all your vegetables together rather than dotting them around the garden and the same goes for your flowers. Planning your garden around water needs of different plants will save you watering time later.

You need to water vegetables to maintain growth. Drought can cause some leafy plants (lettuces etc) to go to seed and fruiting plants to produce small fruit or to drop fruit before it has ripened. For best flavour, many leafy plants need to grow rapidly and be harvested long before they begin to produce flowers. Small seedlings have only a few shallow roots and need constant moisture to grow well.

Lawns and shrubberies

Established lawns do not need to be watered. No matter how brown grass turns over summer, it will soon green up again with a little rain.

Mature trees and shrubs do not need watering either. Less well-established shrubs may need a slow soak once a fortnight. A seep hose for an hour or two should be enough. If you are expecting dry weather, keep weeds down and mulch thoroughly – 20cm is not too deep.

Some shrubs and many smaller flowering plants do very poorly under dry conditions. For advice on what shrubs to grow in your garden check out Greater Wellington's Regional Native Plant Guide (www.gw.govt.nz/native-plant-guide).

Be the Difference

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