

County: Harlan

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Supplementing Water During the Dry Periods

When summer weather heats up with no sign of rain, gardeners hook up the water hose to give their thirsty landscapes a drink. It seems like a simple enough task, but there are some tips to help you get the most from your efforts.

Plants benefit more from occasional heavy watering than from frequent shallow watering. Water equal to about 1-inch of rain penetrates the soil to a depth of about 6 inches which is enough to sustain most plants for a week. Light watering generally wets the soil to a depth of only an inch or less. This top inch of soil may hold some of the plant's roots, but it will dry very rapidly. That means the water is not available to the plant for very long. It is much more effective to water less frequently and more thoroughly. During hot weather, some plants will wilt toward the end of the day – this is normal even if the soil has enough moisture. Look at plants in the morning for signs of drought stress (wilting, cupping of leaves, rolling of grass blades) and apply water when these signs are present. Wait until the next morning if you only see these signs at night.

When you need to water your landscape, use a hose attachment to apply water to the base of the plant. A nozzle with multiple settings breaks the water into finer droplets that soak more easily into the soil. Apply water for several minutes before moving the hose to the next area. You can check with a hand spade to see how far down the soil has gotten moist. Try to apply enough water to soak to a depth of 6 inches. Soaker or drip hoses also are an efficient and effective way to water large areas. Plan to run this type of irrigation system for several hours to accomplish a thorough watering.

Morning is the best time to take care of any overhead watering. This gives wet foliage a chance to dry in the sun. Flowers, leaves and stems that stay wet for several hours can have a higher incidence of disease.

For more gardening information contact the Harlan County Cooperative Extension Service at 573-4464.

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