

Water deeply between the evening and early morning.

This is when evaporation from soil and transpiration from plants is at its lowest. Watering deeply provides a larger 'reservoir' of water in the soil and also encourages the development of deep root systems that are more drought resistant. About 10mm (sandy soils) to 30-40mm (loamy soils) of water should be applied to wet the soil to a suitable root-zone depth.

Get to know your garden and its water needs.

Conditions within a garden can vary dramatically. There might be cool, shady areas or hot, dry areas; sections with well-drained soils or boggy soils; sloped or flat areas. Take advantage of this by choosing plants that are suited to the 'local' conditions or microclimates of your garden.

Understand the performance of your irrigation system or sprinklers.

There is more to watering your plants than just turning on a tap or setting a timer. A well-designed irrigation system will apply water uniformly and at the correct precipitation rate. High watering rates can result in runoff rather than infiltrating the soil. Check the uniformity and application rate by using a number of catch-cans (pet food tins can be used) spaced evenly between sprinkler heads. Measure depth of water in tins (in mm) after watering. For many soils, the precipitation rate should be less than 10mm per hour. If this is being exceeded, cycle your irrigation by operating for short periods with time for soaking allowed in between. Significant variation of water depths between the catch-cans can suggest poor efficiency. Consider changing sprinkler types and or spacing. The watering diameter of sprinklers should reach each other, or what is termed 'head to head' spacing. Seek irrigation system advice from a Certified or Qualified irrigation designer.

Good maintenance keeps a dry garden in great condition.

Regularly check for pests and diseases, and keep your garden weed free. Ensure that your sprinkler system is operating efficiently to avoid wasting water.

Improve your soil.

In new garden beds, incorporate about 40mm of quality, well-composted, fine organic matter in the top 200mm of the soil profile. This should improve the water-holding capacity of the soil. For established gardens, the regular application of mulch will also improve water-holding capacity by gradually increasing the organic content of the soil.

