

How to Water Your Vegetable Garden in Summer

Vegetable (and perennial) plants need an inch of water per week. If it rains an inch, you don't need to water that week. Many people buy a rain gauge and check it after a rainstorm. They keep a mental note throughout the week and water on Sunday evening if necessary.

Water plants deeply and infrequently. There is no reason to water your garden every day. Over-watering can be detrimental by causing fungal issues in vegetables that like drier conditions, such as squash and tomatoes, so let the soil dry out a bit between waterings.

Frequent and shallow watering will cause your plants' roots to stay at the surface of the soil. You want to have deeply rooted plants, so water less often and for a longer duration. Let the water really soak into the soil to encourage the plants' roots to go deeply into the earth.

Water newly seeded vegetables lightly and frequently. In contrast to the second item, if you're waiting for seeds to germinate, watering once a week will not be enough. You need to keep the top of the soil moist until germination. Depending on the vegetable, give a quick soak every one to two days.

Different vegetables take various amounts of time to germinate. Spring radishes will come through the soil in less than seven days, while carrot seeds can take up to three weeks. Both need to be kept moist that whole time.

Water at the base of the plant. Overhead watering is inefficient and can be damaging to plants because it is more likely to spread disease. Use a hose with a wand and hold it at the base of each plant for 20 - 30 seconds. Watch to see how quickly the water is disappearing into the soil. When it starts to pool up, move on to the next plant. This does take longer, but you will end up saving water, and your plants will be healthier.

Water in the morning or evening. Much more water is lost to evaporation when you water during the daytime, especially in mid-afternoon. Water in the cooler morning or evening hours. Also, it is much more pleasant to be out there at those times.

Mulch. Bare soil is a bad idea in a vegetable garden. It's an invitation for many weeds to grow. Your soil will also dry out more quickly and may even crack from lack of moisture. Mulching thickly with hay, straw, or leaves retains the moisture in the soil, keeps weeds at bay, helps with disease issues, and breaks down to add organic matter to your soil.