

## WATERING

**W**atering correctly saves time, money and plants! There are many variables to consider when trying to determine when and how much to water your vegetable garden. As a general rule, beds should be watered when the top several inches of soil is dry. Stick your finger in the soil up to the second knuckle or dig down 2 to 4 inches with a trowel to determine if soil needs additional water. Dry soil will not hold together to form a ball.

Check rainfall amounts to ensure that moisture is adequate. If water is needed, thoroughly moisten the soil to a depth of about 4-6 inches. Consider watering after a light rain to take advantage of nature's contribution. Mulching beds with straw, shredded leaves, or grass clippings also helps conserve moisture and extend the irrigation interval. When daytime temperatures are above 85 check soil daily as it can dry out quickly.

The best time of day to water is early morning before the temperatures begin to rise. This gives the plants a good supply of water to face the heat of the day. Early morning also tends to be a time of lower winds and thus reduced evaporation. If watering cannot be done in the early morning, very late afternoon is also satisfactory. It is important to water early enough so that the leaves have time to dry before nightfall to avoid development of fungal diseases. If possible, choose watering methods that will not wet the leaves (such as soaker hoses) and thus allow for late evening watering.

*Excerpted from Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service and University of Illinois Extension*

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