

THE OUTSIDER

Illinois Extension Horticulture serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark

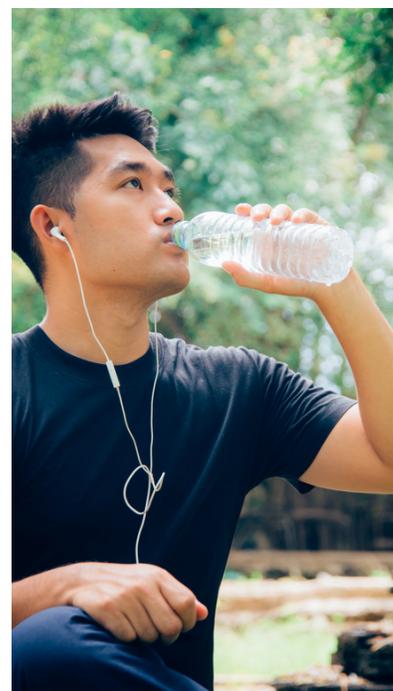


SO THIRSTY...WATER, PLEASE.

Midwestern summers can be challenging when it comes to water in our landscape. Often, we have high temperatures and limited rainfall. This combination can be stressful for plants and in some cases, fatal. Here are some summer watering tips that will help you care for the plants in your landscape.

It has been said that before one can take care anyone or anything else, we must first take care of ourselves. During the heat of the summer (peak growing season), gardeners must take precautions to protect themselves against dehydration and heat related illness. Here are a few ways to garden while minimizing heat impact on the gardener:

- Do yard and garden work in the morning or late evening when the sun is low on the horizon and temperatures are not at their highest. Being in the garden is also a great way to start and end the day.
- Take breaks and moderate your level of effort. Weeding the entire garden in one session may be too ambitious while summer temperatures are high. Set a reasonable expectation and stick to them. Perhaps the goal is to weed two rows in the garden then take a break? Or set a timer for twenty minutes and take a break in a shady area or indoors when the alarm sounds.
- Stay hydrated! Drink water before, during, and after being outdoors. Do not wait until you feel thirsty to take in hydrating fluids, be proactive.
- Seek medical assistance if signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke present themselves



WATERING PLANTS

It is possible to over water plants so test the soil prior to providing supplemental water to plants. An easy way to check soil moisture is to poke or dig down a few inches in the soil and check for moisture. In some cases, the soil surface will have dried out due to sun and wind exposure while moisture remains in the plant root zone. Make watering decisions based on the level of soil moisture at 3 inches deep rather than at the surface level. If supplemental water is needed, follow these tips to water better.

- Watering in the morning is recommended. By doing this, more water will soak into the soil and minimize risk of evaporation. Water should be applied at the base of the plants near the roots, not on the leaves.
- When providing supplemental water, water slow and low. Watering with low pressure allows moisture to gradually soak into the soil while minimizing erosion and water run-off. It is better to provide more water in a single watering session than less water at more frequent intervals. Irrigating in this way promotes deep root development which allows plant to better tolerate periods of drought.
- Quantity of water is dependent on the plant species, soil type, solar exposure, wind exposure, temperatures, and more. However, it can be useful to have a rule of thumb to guide watering choice. In general, one inch of water per week is recommended. Once temperatures exceed ninety degrees, two inches of water per week is recommended.
- Applying mulch around the base of plants can help to help retain soil moisture. Apply mulch around the trunk or stem of the plant, avoid piling mulch on the plant as this can be detrimental.



WATERING LAWNS

During the summer heat, many northern Illinois lawns will slow growth and may even turn brown. These lawns have been planted with cool season grasses that actively grow during cooler seasons and go dormant when the weather warms up. Care and actions taken during this stressful time can have lasting impacts on lawn health and appearance. Here are a few tips to managing turf grass during the summer heat.

- While it may be tempting to provide supplemental water to a lawn in an effort to keep it from turning brown with dormancy, it is a commitment. Consistent watering during summer months is necessary if supplemental irrigation is selected. Cycles of dormancy and active growth will cause stress and make the plants more susceptible to disease and decline.
- Provide supplemental water to dormant grass only if a drought persists for longer than six weeks. Applying $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of water every two to four weeks will maintain the plant crowns until growing conditions improve.
- Mow high, mow often, and use a sharp blade. Set the mower blade to 2.5 to 3 inches and mow often enough so no more than one third of the plant is removed during any one cutting.
- Wait to apply fertilizer during hot, dry conditions. Providing fertilizer will initiate excess growth which should be promoted during cooler weather. Wait until September to apply fertilizer.

By following these few tips, it is possible to help our plants withstand the warmest months of the year so we can enjoy them all year long.



OUTSIDER ACTION

Try these activities to be more of an Outsider

- Get up to date information on Illinois precipitation rates here: <https://stateclimatologist.web.illinois.edu/data/precipitation-maps/>
- Learn how to create a self-watering container here: <https://youtu.be/52NvRLHoev0>

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