

# Drip irrigation helps conserve water

By Melinda Myers

Reduce your workload, increase productivity and be water wise, whether you are planning, planting or already harvesting produce or enjoying beautiful floral displays from your garden.

Container gardeners may want to invest in self-watering pots. These containers have built-in reservoirs to reduce watering frequency. Commercial and homemade self-watering devices can also reduce watering frequency. Just make sure to test their effectiveness before leaving town. Or consider a one-time investment in a drip irrigation system especially designed for container gardens.

Drip irrigation and soaker hoses are also a great way to water in-ground plantings. These irrigation systems apply the water directly to the soil which reduces water lost to overspray, evaporation and runoff. They also reduce the risk and spread of disease by preventing water from settling on the leaves of the plants.



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Photo/Gardener's Supply  
Company

Opt for a micro irrigation system if your water has a high mineral content. These minerals can build up and clog soaker hoses. Micro irrigation systems experience fewer problems and the nozzles can be cleaned to prevent clogs. Because the nozzles can be clipped onto stakes, tomato towers or other supports, this system makes it easy to deliver water right to the plants.

Raised bed gardens will also benefit from irrigation systems. Elevated gardens often dry out more quickly than their in-ground counterparts and need more frequent watering. Some, like the Raised Bed Snip-n-Drip soaker system, are easy to assemble and allow you to water when needed. Further save time by using preformed corners with built-in spigots when constructing raised beds. Simply slide the boards into the metal corner pieces to create the raised bed. Some corner systems, like Aquacorner, have built-in spigots to make irrigation even simpler.

Correctly installed irrigation systems can help conserve water by ensuring you water properly and only when needed. Plus, using a timer and an irrigation system allows you to apply water at the best time for the plants. Just set the timer for early in the morning – when less water is lost to evaporation – and the plants will be watered even if you are not home.

Always water thoroughly and only as needed to encourage plants to develop deep root systems that are more drought-tolerant. Be sure to avoid high nitrogen, fast release fertilizers that promote lush succulent growth which needs more frequent watering.

Further conserve water and time spent watering by grouping

moisture-loving plants together. You can provide needed water more efficiently and avoid overwatering nearby drought-tolerant plants.

And remember to mulch your garden. A thin layer of shredded leaves, evergreen needles or other organic matter helps conserve moisture and reduces erosion. As the mulch breaks down, it helps improve the soil, while decreasing its' water needs.

So make this the year you take a break from watering, while continuing to enjoy beautiful and productive gardens.

*Gardening expert, TV/radio host, author and columnist Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written more 20 gardening books.*