



Tip: Please read some of our other Watering Guideline Handouts.

1. Water: Too Much, Too Little, Too Late?
2. Watering Houseplants and Containers.
3. Water, How Much Should You Water Your Yard?
4. Waterwise Gardening
5. Summer Leaf Scorch

These handouts are available on our website.

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How Do You Keep Hanging Baskets and Planters Looking Gorgeous All Summer?

The answer is a lot simpler than you may think.

This is a commonly asked question in many nurseries and garden centers. If you ask 5 different people, you will probably get 5 different answers - and - most of these different answers are surprisingly correct - because **'There Is Not One Correct Answer For Everyone'.**

When asked "What Do You Recommend to Feed Your Hanging Baskets?" Our Answer is easy and simple, "We suggest using a combination of 3 fertilizers." One is a Slow Release Fertilizer, and the other Two are Water Soluble Fertilizers.



Photo Credit Proven Winners

Osmocote 14-14-14 fertilizer

This product provides stability to your fertilizer program. This fertilizer is often already mixed in the soil of containers, if you bought them pre-planted. Many growers use this product extensively in their fertilizing programs. If Osmocote was not used, sprinkle the Osmocote fertilizer on top of the soil soon after purchase.



Use 1 Tablespoon of Osmocote for a 8" size container, or use 4 Tablespoons of Osmocote for a 14" size patio container.

This product slowly releases fertilizer every time you water.

Tip: If you apply this fertilizer in your containers, reduce the amount of the All Purpose 20-20-20 fertilizer by half.

All Purpose 20-20-20 fertilizer

This product is a basic, well-balanced fertilizer. It is a highly concentrated plant food that is ideal for use on all flowers, hanging baskets, patio planters and in ornamental gardens. It is quick releasing and promotes rapid growth for all types of plants. You can apply it both as a soil drench, and as a foliar spray.



Blooming & Rooting 9-59-8 fertilizer

This is the most important ingredient in our fertilizing program. This product has a very high middle number - phosphorus. It is a highly concentrated plant food that helps promote vigorous blooming and root development. It helps promote larger blooms on all flowers, flowering shrubs, roses, orchids, tomatoes, and on all types of blooming plants.



It is fast acting. You can also use this fertilizer in your regular flower and vegetable gardens, to help the flowers in these gardens bloom more profusely.

Tip: If you want the flowers in the gardens in your yard to look a little extra special for a garden party, or for a special occasion, water them with Blooming and Rooting 9-59-8 Fertilizer once a week; starting at least 3 weeks before your party.

How Often Should You Fertilize Hanging Baskets?

Fertilizing regularly will help keep all your Hanging Baskets and Containers looking great all summer long.

Hanging Baskets and Patio Containers need fertilizing more frequently than regular gardens because fertilizer is washed out of the pot every time you water - with the draining water.

We suggest that you fertilize your containers every other time you water. We suggest that you alternate between the two water



soluble fertilizers. The dosage we suggest is 1 teaspoon of fertilizer per gallon of water.

Fertilizing Example:

- Monday: Plain Water**
- Tuesday: All Purpose 20-20-20**
- Wednesday: Plain Water**
- Thursday: Blooming & Rooting 9-59-8**
- Friday: Plain Water**
- Saturday: All Purpose 20-20-20******
- Sunday: Plain Water**
- Monday: Blooming and Rooting 9-59-8**



****** Reminder: Only apply All Purpose 20-20-20 fertilizer once every 8 days if you use Osmocote 14-14-14 fertilizer.**

Continue this cycle throughout the summer and your planters will be the talk of the neighborhood.

Watering Container Plants

Watering can be very tricky, especially in the spring and early summer, when the plants are still small, and the temperatures can fluctuate quickly.

It is important to check your baskets and containers, prior to watering, to see if they actually need water or not. Too much water can be just as bad for the container - or worse - than not enough water.

Stick your finger in the soil to the second knuckle. If the soil is dry at the tip of your finger, then it is time to water. If it is still wet, wait a while and check it again before watering.

An inexpensive moisture meter can take much of the guesswork out of this procedure.

In the heat of summer, baskets and containers may need to be watered more than once a day. This is especially true on windy days.

When watering, always give the plant enough water so water drains out of the bottom of the container. Wait 15 minutes, and water again until water drains out of the bottom.

A cup or two of water is not nearly enough to keep a large basket or container watered correctly.

Fertilizer Tips:

Do not ever apply any fertilizer to a dry plant. You may actually damage leaves, or kill roots, by fertilizing dry plants.

If the container is dry, water it first with plain water - enough that water drains out the bottom. Wait 15 minutes and water again with plain water. Once drained, apply the correct fertilizer; All Purpose 20-20-20 fertilizer, or Blooming and Rooting 9-59-8 fertilizer.



Container Plants Peculiarities

Container plants have small amounts of soil, and generally need more frequent watering schedules than those planted in the gardens, especially during our hot summer weather.



Photo Credit Proven Winners

If watering by hand, keep a close watch on your plants. Drip emitters and soaker lines can be adapted to hose bibs to water plants on a porch or patio, and do a good job watering container plants throughout the yard, as long as you remember to monitor them on a regular basis. With an automatic watering system you can check your plants often, instead of having to water them so frequently --- just be careful not to neglect them --- a day too late!

Plants in clay pots breathe and dry out quickly. Plants in plastic pots retain water, and do not dry out as fast. Because of these varying factors there is not one 'clear-cut' watering routine for all container plants.

Plants in the sun will need to be watered more frequently than those in the shade. Low humidity and hot winds will also dry out all types of containers more quickly.

Many container plants may need to be watered every day during the heat of the summer. Sometimes these same containers may need to be watered twice in one day, if the conditions warrant it. You may want to move some containers into a more cool, shady location, during the heat of the summer, if watering them becomes a problem.

How much water is enough? Water all your pots until water flows out the bottom; enough water to fill your saucer. Be sure to empty your saucers about one hour after watering your containers.

If the pot remains in standing water, the soil may become waterlogged, and your plant may suffocate and die.

If, on the other hand, a container completely dries out, the soil ball will shrink, and the water will go out along the edge of the pot and down to the bottom, instead of soaking into the soil.

A 'dry' pot will need to be completely soaked in the bathtub, or in a bucket of water, for about 30-60 minutes. It takes that long for the soil to soak in all the water it needs to re-wet the soil. If the 'dry' pot is too large to move, poke holes throughout the surface of the pot, and water the pot every 10 or 15 minutes for at least an hour.



Tip: The smaller the pot, the more often you need to water it. Buy a moisture meter to help you determine your best watering schedule.



Water saving tips:

1. Mix **Soil Moist Crystals** in your potting soil before planting your containers. These polymer crystals absorb water like a sponge, and then slowly release the water as the soil starts to dry out. This storage and release process can reduce water loss by 50% to 75%, particularly on hot, dry days.



2. Mix **Coconut Fiber** with your potting soil to help hold water longer. Coconut fiber retains more moisture than the traditional peatmoss does.



3. Put a one inch layer of moss, bark, or a coarse mulch, on top of the soil, to help conserve moisture loss. A **'Top-Mulch'** helps cool the soil, and helps prevent water from evaporating from the soil surface.

4. **PVC pipes**, which are capped on one end and with holes drilled along its length, can help you water large containers more effectively. Put the pipe in the center of the container (leave it in the pot the entire summer).

Pouring water into the pipe helps distribute water deeply into the large containers. This method helps maintain moisture around the entire root system, and helps the soil stay evenly moist; top to bottom.



Drip Irrigation Systems - Good or Bad?

Example: If a container needs 2 gallons of water.

If one drip emitter allows 1 gallon per hour, one emitter would take 2 hours to water the plant. Or, it would take 4 emitters 30 minutes to water the plant.



Make sure you use enough emitters, and allow enough time, for your drip system to apply the correct amount of water for each plant. Remember, not all containers need the same amount of water. If the pot dries out, water it with a hose.

Other Factors

The amount of water your plants need changes as they grow. While small plants in 4- to 6-inch pots may require only 1 to 2 cups of water when first planted, a full-grown patio container may require 1 to 3 gallons of water each time you water.

The need for water also increases during periods of rapid growth. After you fertilize plants, you need to water a little more, because of the added new growth.

In the fall, as the weather cools, plants need less-water: not 'no-water'. You can enjoy your plants right up to a hard frost.

Continue watering plants, enough to keep the soil moist, until the plants freeze. If the plants just go dormant, continue watering until the weather provides adequate moisture naturally. They do not usually require a lot of water, just a consistent water schedule.

You may also need to water some containers occasionally during the winter, if they will survive the winter.



Summary

Some of the Primary factors to consider when you are trying to determine 'How Much You Should Water'.

Season. Plants do not need a lot of water in the cool months. They need more water in late-spring, and even more in the summer, when active growth is underway. Adjust your watering system to account for these varying needs.

Weather Conditions. Windy weather will dry out your soil and containers. In periods of high wind, you may need to increase your watering. Conversely, during periods of rainy or cool weather, do not water as much, or as often.



Soil type. Different potting mixes have different water holding capacities, and drainage rates. You should learn the soil types in your containers, and then you will be able to determine the best watering schedule for each container.

Location. Is the container on a shady porch, or in a hot sunny area? The location will change the amount of water the plants need, and the frequency the plants will need to be watered.

Type of Plants. Understanding the water needs of different plant groups, and the nature of their growth habits, will help you to be more successful in determining the water needs of your plants.

Readjust frequently. Adjust your irrigation schedules weekly, or even daily, based on weather conditions such as rainfall, temperature, and the season.

Tip: Do Not Stop Watering Plants Just Because The Irrigation Water Is Turned Off in October. Watch the weather to determine your plant's watering needs.

As you can see, there are many factors that you need to take into consideration as you determine how much water each container in your yard requires.



There is not one set method to water all plants, all year long. Adjust your watering schedule as often as the conditions change: Daily; Weekly; Monthly.

Plants can be forgiving, but they do have their limits, and there is a point where they cannot recover from too much, too little, or too late of watering them.