



## Watering Woes

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What an extreme weather year we are having so far! We had two 95-degree F days in April. With no rain for a while, it seemed like I could not keep my new plantings watered. Now, we are cool and wet, but most likely our hot and dry summer weather will return.

By and far, the easiest way to water our crops is with a sprinkler. We can control the amount of water placed on the soil by the duration of time we leave the sprinkler running. Although very easy to use, they do end up wasting a lot of water. First, a lot of the water can evaporate before it even hits the ground. Second, a lot of water is put down on the weeds between our crops, the surrounding area, and other areas we may have never intended to water.

Fortunately, there are inexpensive sprinklers that have eight spray patterns to choose from that allow for many watering configurations. These are generally ideal for some smaller areas, and/or oddly shaped areas. Oscillating sprinklers have the old-school, spray-bar-styled set up. Many of the newer versions allow you to limit the oscillations of these, or how much of the spray bar is active, but are highly dependent on proper water pressure.



Watering devices. Photo by M. Lisy

Impact sprinklers are one of my favorite types. These spin around while an arm regularly interrupts the flow of water. You can control how far the water projects and how streamlined or dispersed the spray pattern is. One disadvantage is the area is always circular, but our lawns and

gardens generally are not. Try impact sprinklers that are placed on top of a tripod, so you can reach above the plants without interference. These can complete a full circle or be set to only do a portion of the circular pattern.

A timer can add reliability to your watering, although I do not care for them. Regular observation of your plants is the best way to find insect problems before they get out of control, some weeding that needs to be done, spot diseases, or discover nutritional deficiencies. Timers require you to leave your spigot on permanently, and should you develop a leak, it will cost you.

Sometimes you just need focused watering, like with new plantings or with flowerpots. This is where a good hose nozzle with many spray patterns comes in handy. Although these seem nice, they do not put out a lot of water. This is where a water breaker is advantageous. They essentially let the full flow of the hose discharge, but they break that water up into tiny individual water sprays. This allows quick and significant irrigation of your plants or pots.

In many parts of the country, water is scarce, but not so much here in New England. This does not mean that we should waste water as you still pay for every drop. One of the best compromises is the use of a soaker hose. These are generally very cheap, and gently soak the soil around the base of the plants. Another technology can reduce water use even further, and that is drip irrigation. These can be a bit more expensive as they usually need some control boxes, special hoses, and a number of fittings, but water is sent only to your plants and nowhere else. The disadvantage to these watering techniques is that it takes quite a bit of time to set up.

A nice thick layer of mulch on your plants can go a long way to hold in moisture and prevent evaporation. Incorporating more organic matter into your soil will help it retain water and therefore reduce the frequency of watering as well. A good soil test can tell you how much organic material you have present, as well as the composition of your soil. Sandy soils drain quicker and hold less water, for example.

Unfortunately, with watering, there is not one size that fits all. I have a large collection of sprinklers, hose nozzles, breakers, and hose types that I have accumulated over the years. Which I use depends on my crop type, age of the crop, and how much rain we have had.

For your gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu](http://www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.