



Homeowner Water Guide

Watering 101 – New, Developing Landscape

Spending time in an outdoor space that is inviting and beautiful, low maintenance and easy on the environment, is summer's great reward. Starting with the Yardsmart Basics to help build your landscape from the ground up can, over time, provide you with that ideal outdoor space. Considering the watering needs of plant material when establishing your Yardsmart landscape, is key to having a beautiful, drought tolerant space to enjoy for years to come.

Outdoor water use can increase our water bill by 30-40% in the summer months. Keeping a close eye on the watering needs of plant material when establishing your new landscape can help keep this increase to a minimum. Be sure to only apply water to plants when needed and check watering tools regularly (including automatic irrigation systems) to ensure they aren't leaking causing an increase in your water bill.

Track your water use

Knowing how much water you currently use outdoors will help you track water savings in the future. Compare your average monthly water use over the winter months, to the months you are using water outdoors in the summer. The difference between summer and winter consumption is the volume of water that you are using outdoors. To compare to the previous year, look at past bills, or at the historical water use graph at the top of your water bill to get a year over year comparison.



	When to start watering (spring)	When to stop watering (fall)	How often to water	Where to water	Right watering tool for the job	Visual clues to indicate water needed	How much to water	What else do I need to know?
Perennials (< 8 weeks)	Look for new growth and/or soil warmth	When first hard frost occurs	Species dependent, approximately every six days	At base of plant	Drip irrigation, watering can, watering wand	Wilting leaves, plant reaching for ground, check for dry soil near base of plant	Until soil is moist to the base of the root system (approximately 1-2" down), low and slow	Visual clues of under watering often look the same as overwatering. Be sure to check the soil moisture around plant base to determine whether plant requires water.
Annuals (< 3 weeks)	Upon planting/ seeding	When plant dies/ petals fall	Every one to two days, as long as soil is drying out between	At base of plant	Drip irrigation, watering can, watering wand	Wilting leaves, plant reaching for ground, check for dry soil near base of plant	Until soil is moist to the base of the root system (approximately 1-2" down), low and slow Containers – until water coming out bottom of pot	Container plants (potted plants) generally dry out more frequently and require more water than plants in the ground.
Trees (< 3 years)	Once ground is not frozen and buds are starting to swell	When ground is frozen	Weekly, check for dry soil	Area under the drip line	Garden hose, soaker hose, drip irrigation, tree gator	Wilting/falling leaves, branches and buds are hard/stiff	Water your tree for about 30 minutes with water flowing at just a trickle. Water needs to penetrate approximately 10 inches below the surface. Stop if you see water pooling or running off the surface.	For more information go to calgary.ca/trees
Shrubs (< 8 weeks)	Once ground is not frozen and buds are starting to swell	When ground is frozen	Weekly, check for dry soil	Area under the drip line	Garden hose, soaker hose, drip irrigation	Wilting leaves, droopy appearance	Deep enough to moisten the entire root zone. Check for dry soils before watering	For more information go to calgary.ca , search tree and shrub care
Lawns – Seed (< 4 weeks)	After seeding	N/A	0 to 10 days – 1x/day (2x/day if hot and dry) 10 to 28 days – 1x/day	Over entire area. Be sure to water early in morning and ensure your sprinklers are directed away from driveways and sidewalks.	Automatic irrigation system, garden hose with sprinkler	Seeds are not germinating	0 to 10 days - 10-15 minutes to a soil depth of ¼" 10-to 28 days - 30 minutes to a soil depth of ½" – do not allow puddling; every 3-4 days ensure soil has opportunity to dry out before next watering	Frequent, light watering will keep soil moist and will spur seed germination, deep watering is not necessary at this time. As seedlings emerge, the intervals between watering can be lengthened
Lawns – Sod (< 3 weeks)	Upon installation	N/A	0 to 10 days – 1x/ day, (if hot and sunny 2x/day) 10 to 21 days – every other day	Over entire area. Be sure to water early in morning and ensure your sprinklers are directed away from driveways and sidewalks.	Automatic irrigation system, garden hose with sprinkler	Edges between sod are pulling apart or separating	0 to 10 days – 15 to 20 minutes 10 to 21 days – 30 minutes	Do not water late at night or in the evenings as new seedlings are susceptible to disease. Pull gently on corner of sod to ensure sod is properly rooting.



General information

In addition to the guidelines above, there are a number of key factors that influence how often and how much you should apply water to your landscapes.



- Water is best applied according to your soil type, weather and plant type.
- How fast or slow or system applies water affects how much water is absorbed or wasted through run off or evaporation. Always water low and slow, and never apply water faster than your soil can absorb.
- Water before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m. to reduce evaporation that occurs when watering midday.
- Sun, shade and wind affect how much water evaporates from the soil. Adding mulch to cover soil around plants/shrubs/trees helps retain soil moisture.
- Plants prefer rain water over water from the hose. Set up your rain barrel to collect rain water to use on your landscape. For more information on rain barrels, visit calgary.ca and search rain barrels.
- For more information on irrigation, read the Homeowner Water Guide - Efficient Irrigation.

Soils

Soil texture influences how much moisture the soil can retain and for how long. This will also affect how long it takes to moisten the root zone, and how quickly the soils will dry out again.



- Checking soil moisture with a soil moisture meter both before and after watering is the best indicator of adequate watering. Soils in Calgary are generally clay based and retain more moisture than it might appear.
- Amend your soils with compost to improve soil texture and health.
- Increase the amount of top soil wherever possible. Having a minimum of eight inches of top soil will improve water absorption and drainage of your soil. An online top soil calculator is available at calgary.ca to determine how much soil you need for a project.

Plant needs

Some plants need regular watering; others less. How you water new plants affects root development, which in turn affects how much water they will consume in the future.



- Always read the plant tag to know what each plant specifically needs depending on their location requirement, and put the right plant in the right place (eg. full sun, part shade, shade, etc).
- Avoid planting in hot, dry weather as this easily stresses plants and can place highly demands on watering needs.
- Select plants appropriate for your growing zone – native and drought-tolerant plant species will require less water.

