

Watering Guide

Watering the gardens in your schoolyard is essential to the long term health and success of your garden. One member of your school's Garden Team or facility management team should be responsible for ensuring that the schoolyard plants are watered regularly.

Watering Your Gardens and Trees

In-Ground Plantings

Successful watering takes time. Spraying the plants from above will not provide adequate water; rather, you must soak the soil surrounding the base of the plants. Expect to water the in-ground plants for 10-15 seconds each, depending on their size (larger plants will need more water). Only water the roots of your plants; the leaves, stems and flowers of a plant do not need to be watered. Plants should be deeply watered on a daily basis for at least the first week after installation. After the first week, watering can be decreased to every other day.

Your schoolyard likely has native gardens or rain gardens that have perennial plants, which means you only need to plant them once and they will grow back every year. It is crucial to keep an eye on the amount of water the plants are receiving the first year (especially during the summer) so that their roots begin to grow in the new soil. As always, exactly how much and how often the gardens need to be watered depends on many variables including soil type, air temperature, maturity of plants, types of plants, rainfall, sunlight, wind, garden surface and mulching.

You can use the Watering Schedule on the next page to help gauge your watering needs. After the first couple of years, well established plants may only need to be watered during dry weather.

You can also use the yardstick test: To see if you have watered long enough, or if it is time to water your plants, insert a yard stick into the soil as deep as the plant's roots. If you pull the yard stick out and soil is attached to the stick, then you have watered thoroughly. Remember that watering will be dependent on rainfall and the weather (such as the amount of sun and wind that removes water from the soil), so if you are unsure whether your plants need water, do the yardstick test. If the soil is dry an inch below the surface, then you should water your plants.

Shrubs and Trees

Slowly soak the area around the base of shrubs and

trees, allowing the water to travel deep down to the bottom of the roots. Let the water soak the soil until the top 18 inches of soil are wet, because this is where majority of the water-absorbing roots are. Water your shrubs and trees every other day for the first couple of weeks, making sure each one gets at least one inch of water each time. For the rest of the first year, be sure the plants get 1-2 inches of water every week, either by rainfall or hand watering. Consider purchasing a rain gauge in order to measure how much water your garden is receiving.

During hot, dry periods, water your trees with 15 to 25 gallons of clean water per week. This is the equivalent of running a slow running hose near the base of your tree for 30 minutes, filling a five gallon bucket with holes in the bottom five times throughout the week, or filling a 15 to 25 gallon watering bag installed around your young tree once weekly. Do not pour used cleaning water on your trees.

Raised Garden Beds (Edible Gardens)

When watering seeds and seedlings, the soil around the seeds should be damp, not waterlogged. Be careful not to flood the area that was just seeded because the seeds may move from their intended locations by the water. It is best to use a spray bottle or hose nozzle that has a misting setting when watering seeds.

Your raised beds may have an irrigation system already installed; if so, you only need to hook up your hose to the drip irrigation system. If you have raised garden beds without an irrigation system, simply water with a hand sprinkler. In the beginning, water the beds so that the soil surface is moist most of the time. The amount of water necessary to keep the soil damp depends on what type of plants are in your garden, as different plants need different amounts of water to survive. Check the beds daily to ensure that the soil surface is damp for the first few weeks. Simply stick your finger in about an inch deep, and if it still wet, you do not need to water. As the fall growing season continues, the gardens will need less frequent watering. To help retain moisture, mulch can be used in between plants.



Watering Schedule

The following schedule will be helpful for the first year of your gardens. The schedule assumes that your gardens will be planted in October. If you need additional assistance or an adjusted schedule, please let your School Planning Coordinator know.

OCTOBER

In-ground plantings

- Deeply water on a daily basis for the first week after being planted.
- Water every other day the rest of the month.

Shrubs and Trees

- Slowly soak shrub and tree roots every other day for the first two weeks after being planted.

Raised Garden Beds

- Check the beds daily to ensure that the soil surface is damp for the first few weeks.



NOVEMBER THROUGH FEBRUARY

- No watering necessary.
- The raised beds should have crops that can survive the winter, and resume growth early spring.
- Native plants will go dormant for the winter; they may look dead, but they are alive.
- Be sure the gardens have a thorough covering of mulch to protect them from the cold.
- Beware of using salt in the schoolyard during the winter months as salt residue can severely damage plants; consider sand or calcium chloride for safer alternatives.

MARCH THROUGH MAY

In-ground plantings

- Be sure the plants get 1-2 inches of water every week, either by rainfall or hand watering. Conduct the yardstick test to make sure the plants have enough water. Depending upon the weather, you may need to water as often as every other day.

Shrubs and Trees

- Be sure the plants get 1-2 inches of water every week, either by rainfall or hand watering.

Raised Garden Beds

- Frequent but light watering in the beginning of spring. As the season goes on, check the soil surface before and after school on warmer, sunnier days to make sure soil hasn't dried out.

JUNE THROUGH SEPTEMBER

In-ground plantings

- Be sure the plants get 1-2 inches of water every week, either by rainfall or hand watering. Conduct the yardstick test to make sure the plants have enough water. Deeper, longer and less regular watering will be likely during this time of year.

Shrubs and Trees

- Be sure the plants get 1-2 inches of water every week, either by rainfall or hand watering.

Raised Garden Beds

- In the middle of summer, deep daily watering is recommended.
- Raised beds will dry more quickly than in-ground beds and need to be monitored more closely.



Watering Tools Checklist

The following tools will ensure that you are well equipped to successfully water your gardens. This checklist will also ensure that your Garden Team knows what tools are available to them and where to find them. You should forward a copy of this checklist and information to your School Planning Coordinator. If you need any assistance, information or instruction about watering your garden, contact your School Planning Coordinator.

REQUIRED

- Hose (be sure it is long enough to reach all of the plants)
- Spray nozzle with a soaker pattern (to soak other in-ground plantings)
- Water key



Where is the equipment stored?

RECOMMENDED

- Multiple hoses and nozzles
- 4-way splitter (for raised beds with an integrated irrigation system)
- Watering bags for trees
- Rain gauge

What is your water source?

If your water source needs additional equipment (i.e. water connection, key to access it, etc.), please identify:



Who keeps track of this equipment?

Name:

Phone:

