



Homeowner Water Guide

Watering 101 – Established, Mature Landscaping

Keeping your outdoor space beautiful doesn't have to be costly or high maintenance. Sticking to YardSmart principles, and knowing when and how much to water can keep your mature yard beautiful for years to come.

Outdoor watering can increase your home's water use between 30 and 40 per cent in the summer months. Ensuring you are only watering when it's needed can help keep an increase on your monthly water bill to a minimum, and helps plants become more resilient. Be sure to check watering tools (including automatic irrigation systems) regularly 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 can 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 soil warmth	When first hard frost occurs	Species dependent, approximately every 10 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	Bi-weekly, check for dry soil	At the drip line	Garden hose, soaker hose, drip irrigation, bubbler	Wilting leaves, dropping branches	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	Bi-weekly, check for dry soil	At 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 (> 4 weeks)	Do not begin until you note visual cues. Soil may have extra moisture from melted snowpack	When day length shortens and nights are cool. Lawns will start to become dormant and growth will stop.	Twice a week at most and only if needed. Always check to see if there is rain in the forecast before you water.	Over entire area	Garden hose with sprinkler, automatic irrigation system	Grass fails to spring back after being stepped on, dull green colour and wilted, grass feels warm in the evening after sun has set.	Apply water low and slow, for short intervals (five to eight minutes) to ensure all water is being absorbed. Reapply at these short intervals until water starts to run off or pool.	For more information on irrigating your lawn read the Homeowner Water Guide – Efficient Irrigation



General information

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



- Water is best applied according to your soil type, weather and plant type.
- How fast or slow your 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.

