



## FACT SHEET

# When and How to Water Your Yard

During a drought, many Colorado communities enact mandatory or voluntary outdoor watering restrictions that limit watering to specific days during the week. Don't feel compelled to water just because it's your designated watering day. Over watering is wasteful and can actually harm plants.

Following these simple guidelines from plant and landscape experts can help you apply the right amount of water to your yard, at the right time, to keep your landscape healthy. While it's important to follow restrictions if they apply, these tips can help you use water wisely every year, wet or dry.

### Tip #1: Check your soil for moisture first

Prior to watering, check the moisture in the soil. An easy way to check soil moisture is by inserting a screwdriver in the soil. If it is easy to push in, do not water (note: with sandy soil you may still need to water even if the screwdriver inserts easily). If the screwdriver is hard to insert, you probably need to water that day or on your next designated watering day.



### Tip #2: Look for footprints in the lawn

Beware of signs of dehydration in your lawn. Be concerned if grass has a purplish tint, blades turn steel gray, footprints are left when walked upon, and most serious, when grass blades turn straw color.



### Tip #3: Water only if the plants need it

Plants actually do better when they are only watered when they need it. Snow, rain or cooler temperatures might mean you only have to water once a week, or maybe not at all. This applies whether you're watering from a sprinkler system or a hose. When water is needed, water deeply and infrequently to encourage deep root growth and to decrease supplemental water requirements. Drip irrigation (shown below) is one of the best ways to water deeply.



## Tip #4: Water lawns wisely

A typical Colorado lawn will require up to 1 inch of supplemental water each week to stay healthy.

Professionals recommend a cycle-and-soak watering method to maximize absorption and minimize runoff. For example, pop-up spray heads require three short cycles with 15-30 minute intervals in place of one long cycle. An automatic rotating sprinkler head, or the oscillating type attached to a hose, will typically require three times more run time to deliver equivalent water since it rotates and is not stationary.

When sod is installed, begin watering to build up sub-soil moisture. This is the most critical time to water. Probe the soil to make sure the moisture has penetrated at least 4 inches. Generally in weeks 3 and 4, transition from frequent water applications per day to an increased number of days between watering. By the end of the establishment period, the grass can go several days between watering and should be ready for routine maintenance. If your community is enacting restrictions, check with the water provider about getting a permit that allows more watering to establish a new landscape.

A newly seeded lawn must be kept moist, but not saturated, until the seeds germinate. Depending on the weather and site conditions, this may mean watering for a short time several times a day. As the grass begins to grow, reduce the frequency of watering. After four to six weeks, watering should be reduced to the amount recommended for an established lawn.



## Tip #5: Water veggies at the root

A healthy vegetable and annual flower garden can use less or about the same amount of water as a lawn does. Watering by hand or drip irrigation systems will use the least amount of water. Vegetables need deeper watering because their roots are longer. Use the screwdriver test before watering. Apply water close to the plant's root system.



## Tip #6: Give new trees more water until established

Trees and other woody plants typically require additional watering for one to two growing seasons to become established. This includes winter watering, when snow is absent. Tree roots can spread two to four times wider than the height of the tree, and the absorbing feeder roots are located in the top 12-18 inches of the soil. Apply water so it moistens the critical root zone to a depth of 12 inches. Water should be applied at a rate that allows it to soak slowly into the soil. Drip irrigation systems, soaker hoses, watering forks and spray wands allow for slow watering. You can water less after the trees are established. Don't forget to move drippers and soaker hose further away from the trunk as the tree matures.



### For more information:

**Green Industries of Colorado** – [www.greenco.org](http://www.greenco.org)  
Industry Best Management Practices and conservation resources

**Plant Select** – [www.plantselect.org](http://www.plantselect.org)  
Water-wise plants suitable for the Rocky Mountain region

**CWCB Drought Response Portal** – [www.coh2o.co](http://www.coh2o.co)  
Drought conditions and state-wide watering restrictions

*This fact sheet is part of the Green Industries of Colorado (GreenCO) education series. GreenCO is an alliance of seven trade associations representing all facets of horticulture and landscape industries. This educational material is courtesy of GreenCO and made possible through a Water Efficiency Program Grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB).*