



## July's Tasks – Watering and Weeding

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Many parts of the Northeast have received lower than normal amounts of rainfall during June and July. Because of this, some towns have instituted water bans, restricting residents' usage of water on outdoor plantings. At the same time, our vegetable gardens are in full swing with early crops like broccoli, sugar snap peas and chard producing abundantly. Pepper, bean, cucumber and squash plants are flowering and green tomatoes are on the vine. To keep the garden growing, water is needed, either from Mother Nature or you.

The only good thing about all this humidity is that plants transpire less, which means they are using less water. Not much less during these hot days, but a little less.

Check your container plants daily. Plants in smaller containers need water almost every day while larger containers and window boxes might require waterings every other or even third day during humid weather. When watering containers, add enough so that you notice a few drips from the drainage holes. Stick a finger into the potting mix if you are unsure about adding water. If it feels moist about one-half inch down, it is likely okay for another day.

Overwatering causes root rots and other diseases. Water when the potting mix feels dry to the touch but don't let the media dry out so much it pulls away from the sides of the pot. When this happens, any water added to the pot simply flows out the drainage holes. To rehydrate plants, place the pot in a tub with about 2 inches of water and leave until the potting mix is saturated.

How often your gardens need to be watered depends on the weather as well as the amount of organic matter incorporated into your garden soil and whether or not a mulch is used. Organic matter acts like a sponge so soils with adequate amounts can hold more water. Mulches reduce the amount of water lost from the soil by evaporation.

Most plants require about an inch of water per week and maybe a bit more during dry, hot weather. Use a rain gauge to determine how much water your garden receives either by precipitation or your sprinkler. Either stick a finger into the soil or use a trowel to see if water is needed. If more than the top half inch to inch is dry, it is time to water.

Ideally, plants should be watered deeply once or twice a week. Soaker hoses or drip irrigation systems would be the most efficient way to water. It makes the most sense to install them at the beginning of the gardening season so consider this for next year. If using a sprinkler this year, try to not to irrigate in the middle of the day as much of the water will be lost to evaporation. Morning is best as the foliage has a chance to dry off before evening reducing the chance of diseases.

A great competitor for the water you are giving your plants are weeds. Those sporadic rain showers we have been getting not only benefit our plants but encourage weed seed germination and growth. It is truly amazing how fast a crabgrass or purslane or pigweed can grow – seems like they double their size every 24 hours. This may be a bit exaggerated, but it seems to me that they grow a lot faster than my vegetables.

The best time to weed is after a rain or watering when the soil is soft, and weeds can be pulled with ease. It's hard to spend a few hours weeding on these hot, muggy weekends. Try for 30 minutes or so after supper during the week. You will be pleasantly surprised with how much can get accomplished.

There are dozens of weeding tools on the market. I tend to weed on my hands and knees and find the cobra head cultivator and dandelion weeder to work well for me. Others in my family like to stand and find long handled cultivators and hoes to suit their purpose. One might have to try a few tools to find one that matches their ergonomic requirements plus weeding needs.

Do your best to supply your plants with adequate moisture throughout the growing season and to reduce competition for both water and nutrients from weeds.

If you have questions about watering or weed identification or on queries on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

