

## WATER AWARENESS

- ❖ The average allotment in Lichfield uses 2000 litres of water per annum (based on an analysis of bills over a 5 year period)
- ❖ This is the equivalent of 140 trips to a trough per person carrying two watering cans in a growing season!
- ❖ The average plot holder will have carried nearly 2 TONS of water!!

So here are some suggestions from the RHS on successful watering:-

- ❖ The key to watering successfully is to water thoroughly to a depth of 30cm (1ft). Avoid watering the top centimetre or so on a daily basis, for example. Watering every 10-14 days (if there is no rain) is a general guide.
- ❖ Dig down to a spade's depth to see if there is moisture in the soil; if so watering is unnecessary. Bear in mind that sandy soils can look dry but still contain moisture and clay soils can look wet, but the water is held too tightly for plants to access.
- ❖ Watch the weather forecast. Nothing is more galling – and wasteful – than to spend the evening watering only for a summer storm to soak everything overnight.
- ❖ When sowing seed, water the drill before the seed goes in. Don't water on the surface – that can cause a caked layer which baby leaves find hard to break through.
- ❖ Prepare a trench for thirsty plants like courgettes or runner beans. Bury a layer of home-made compost about 6ins (15cm) down where it will hold water like a sponge.
- ❖ Make sure squash, courgettes and runner beans get water right where they need it by sinking an old flower pot next to the stem at planting time, or down the middle of your row of beans. You can then pour water into these and none will be lost by evaporation. This will also encourage deep-rooting, which surface watering discourages.
- ❖ Watering when the plant does not need it can increase the growth of the plant, but not the size of the part that is to be harvested
- ❖ Keep vegetable-growing areas free of weeds. A surprising amount of moisture can be taken from the soil by weeds
- ❖ Use mulches where you can. Mulches are suitable for permanent plants like fruit bushes, and long-term crops like runner beans.
- ❖ Over-watering can kill plants (peppers are particularly vulnerable). Fungal diseases thrive in waterlogged soil.
- ❖ Splashing foliage with water also encourages fungal disease. You can use a 'foliar feed' with seaweed extract which helps keep plants healthy.

- ❖ Use a hoe all through summer to fluff up the soil surface. This helps keep water round the roots where it is needed. It also keeps weeds right down!
- ❖ Add as much organic matter as you can, it will hold water like a sponge. Home-made compost, spent compost from hanging baskets, manure, mushroom compost – use whatever you can get.

- ❖ **Which crops need watering when?**

- ❖ The amount of water needed by the crop depends on which part of the plant is eaten.

**Legumes**

- ❖ Broad beans and peas need lots of water at flowering time in order for pods to set and, again, two weeks after flowering begins. As young plants, avoid too much water as this can encourage leafy growth and reduce the yield. Runner beans need constant moisture for pods to set, whereas French beans are less sensitive to some dryness.

**Stem vegetables**

- ❖ Celery, celeriac and Florence fennel need water during growth. Periods of drought stress are very damaging and should be avoided – it can lead to bolting or poor quality crops.

**Curcubits**

- ❖ Courgettes need constant moisture all the way through to harvest. Marrows, pumpkin and winter squash benefit from watering but, in practice, often produce fair fruits from minimal watering. Trailing types need less water as their spreading habit conserves moisture and the stems root where they touch the ground

**Fruiting crops**

- ❖ Aubergines, sweet corn and tomatoes all need watering well to aid establishment and also throughout the flowering and fruiting period

**Leafy crops**

- ❖ Cabbages, chard, lettuce and all salad crops, need water at every stage of growth. If water is especially short, make sure that you soak the ground around cabbages and lettuces when hearts begin to form

**Root crops**

- ❖ Carrots, beetroot and parsnips require watering before the soil becomes dry, for example, if there are 14 days without rain
- ❖ Onions, shallots and leeks need only to be watered when they are establishing, and in very dry spells
- ❖ Potatoes benefit from being watered every 10-14 days once the tubers are marble-size
- ❖ Radishes need to be watered every week in dry spells

Source: RHS website

**REMEMBER OUR WATER BILLS ARE BASED ON METERED USAGE**

**OTHER ALLOTMENT SOCIETIES RAISE A SEPARATE CHARGE FOR WATER**

**PLEASE WATER WISELY AND HELP KEEP RENTS LOW**