

## Proper Watering for Your Spring Rack Plants & Hanging Baskets

Proper watering of container plants is crucial to having them perform at their best. Once you get a little bit of experience, understanding when and how much to water becomes almost second nature. Initially, however, figuring out how to make those plants happy can be pure frustration! The most common cause of early plant death is generally considered to be over-watering. That said, 90% of container plants will be happy if you follow these simple guidelines:

When planting in a pot, make sure there's at least one drainage hole in the bottom of the pot. Proper drainage is essential to happy roots and happy roots are essential for happy plants. Pots that do not have proper drainage are very easy to over-water.

Rather than watering on a set schedule, always check first to see if your plants actually need water. If your plant is in a pot, check the soil surface in the pot either by looking at it or touching it with your finger. Wet soil will be dark in color while dry soil will be lighter in color. For peat-based soil mixes, (the most common type), this means dark brown to black is wet, while 'paper bag' brown is dry. If the surface of the soil is dry to the touch (or looks dry), water your plants. You may need to check your plants twice daily to see if they need water. Remember, just because one pot needs water, that doesn't mean that they all do! Differences in pot and plant sizes will impact how quickly a pot dries out.

When you water, be sure to moisten the entire root zone: water it until water comes out of the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot. It may take as much as  $\frac{3}{4}$  gallon of water to thoroughly water a 10"- 12" container. More plants are killed with "cups of kindness" rather than a good long drink of water. Plants that are watered regularly seldom develop roots in the bottom of the container. When that daily cup of water is not available, the plant wilts and is much more prone to dying as a result of dehydration.

Ensuring that the whole root zone is watered is important for 2 reasons. Firstly, it will encourage roots to grow all the way to the bottom of the pot which means happier plants. Secondly, you won't have to water as often if you water thoroughly. Do not allow the pot to sit in water. Pots sitting in water will keep the soil in the pot too wet. Always allow excess water to drain away.

Here's your "quick sheet":

- Be sure your pot has drainage holes
- Water only when the top of the soil is dry
- Water until water comes out of the drainage holes
- Don't allow your pot to sit in standing water

A few more tips on containers: Early in spring, when your plants are smaller and temperatures are lower, you may only need to water every 3-4 days. As plants get larger and temperatures rise, be prepared to water every day. And with small plants, you may need to water twice daily. You will also need to water more quickly if it is a windy day. Wind will cause pots to dry out more quickly, especially hanging baskets.

If you have dried your pot down to the point that the plant is wilting, it may take more than standard watering practices to get the plant hydrated again. Commercial potting mixes can become almost water

repellent if they get too dry. If you water your plant and it seems like all of the water is running down between the sides of the pot and soil ball, you may need to take steps to re-hydrate the soil. Fill a tub with water and soak your pot in the water until the soil has expanded and is no longer pulling away from the edge of the pot. Resume normal watering practices.

If soaking your pot or basket in a tub of water is impractical, you can also rehydrate by watering repeatedly. To do this, water the plant liberally; it will likely seem like most of the water is running around the soil rather than soaking into the soil. Wait 30 minutes to an hour and then water again; it should seem like more water is soaking into the soil. Wait another 30 minutes to an hour and water one last time. By the third watering, the soil should be hydrated and taking up water like normal again. This method works because the first watering starts to moisten the soil surface even though not much water soaks in. The following water doses are then better able to penetrate the soil ball and moisten the entire basket. Waiting between each watering allows the water you have already added enough time to soak into the soil and helps to make the soil less water repellent. For most plants, the watering guidelines described above are perfect. There will always be those plants that prefer to be kept drier i.e. cacti, some succulents, etc. or more wet, but for the most part, these watering guidelines will work beautifully.

Happy Blooming!

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