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Plant Watering Instructions

Shrubbery and small trees should receive supplemental water for several months after installation. Shrubs ten to twenty inches in diameter/height will require 1 ½ gallons twice weekly. Larger shrubs twenty-four to thirty-six inches in diameter/height will require 2 ½ gallons of water twice weekly. Likewise, small trees (less than five feet tall) will require 2 ½ gallons of water twice weekly. After 6-9 weeks, watering frequency can be reduced as roots have begun to collect their own water under typical weather conditions.

Conditions such as soil quality and weather will directly affect the amount of water each plant will need over a given period. If possible, rainfall should be monitored and supplemental water tempered accordingly.

During dry spells, the soil around the newly installed plant will be dry and "wick" a percentage of supplemental water away from the intended target plant. So while it may seem that the recommended amount of supplemental water is in excess, accommodation of this "wicking" is vital to providing adequate water for plant establishment.

Alternatively, when rain averages an inch or more in a given week, the supplemental water can be given once per week.

Watering must be done correctly to ensure plant establishment and long term vigor. It is the *need* for water that stimulates root growth. Keeping a plant wet will interfere with root growth and could, under prolonged wet conditions, cause a plant to drown. An overall yellowing is an indication that the plant is being watered too much. Drowning is evident when the soil is obviously moist/wet and yet the plant is wilted in appearance. When a plant is too dry, the foliage will tend to droop or hang, may wilt or even turn a greenish gray/blue color. When the fine twigs or bark begin wrinkling, the plant may have undergone an irreversible drying and require severe pruning or replacement.

Watering thoroughly is very important. Penetration to the lower soil horizon will promote root growth deep into the ground. Shallow watering will promote root growth at the soil surface and as a consequence, place the long-term stability of the plant in jeopardy. Since the soil surface moisture fluctuates readily with sun or wind extremes, soil drying can occur often and quickly.

The placement of bark mulch helps retain soil surface moisture. However, watering properly requires that the water gets through the mulch and not simply darkens it. Pulling a small area aside to expose the soil will ensure the water is getting to the soil rather than only on the bark mulch.

To be successful in establishing a new planting, monitor your rainfall and follow these guidelines.

THE GOLDEN RULE CHECK FOR MOISTURE BEFORE YOU WATER!

Until the root system is established – which is usually one full year – you should check the soil for moisture to accurately determine how dry or wet it is. This can be done by using a moisture meter or by pulling back the mulch and feeling the soil with your hands along side the rootball about four inches below ground level.

During the spring and fall, you should check the soil moisture approximately every 3-5 days. During the hot and dry summer months, this should be done every 2-3 days for smaller plants and every 3-5 days for larger plants and trees. If the soil is dry, water thoroughly until the entire root ball and surrounding soil is wet again. If it is moist, do not water and check the soil in another few days. The object of watering is to find that “happy medium” – neither too wet nor too dry. Learn how long it takes your particular soil to dry slightly between waterings. You should not water a plant unless it needs water! Be aware that both too little water (top moist and bottom dry) and too much water (constant saturation) can be fatal.

If for whatever reason you do encounter a problem with your plants, please contact us at the garden center as soon as possible so that one of our plant specialists can discuss your situation with you. If symptoms begin to occur such as wilting, yellowing or falling leaves, we can usually determine what might be causing the problem and take corrective action.

When properly planted and cared for your plants will prosper – “a happy plant is a healthy plant.” Insects and plant diseases are rarely a major problem with happy plants! Enjoy your new plants from Merrifield Garden Center!

Various Watering Methods:

There are many different ways to thoroughly water plants. If you have found a method that has proven successful over the years, then by all means stick with it. Because there are many variables, such as the amount of sun or shade in the garden and whether the plants are container grown or balled and burlapped, one set of instructions will not fit all circumstances. But here are some watering techniques that you might find helpful:

- **GARDEN HOSE** - You can take a regular garden hose and turn the water on at a slow trickle and set the end of the hose right over top of the root ball of a plant. Again, how long you let the water run will be determined by the size of the plant. For example, during hot and dry weather on a large tree with a trunk that is 2 1/2" in diameter, you should let the hose run for approximately 1 1/2 hours. Since water often will follow a path, it is best to move the end of the hose several times during watering to ensure that the entire root ball is saturated. This method is ideal for watering a single plant or tree or a small number of plants.
- **SOAKER HOSE** - You can use a soaker hose which applies water slowly to the plants. There are several different types of soaker hoses to choose from, and they are typically used to water plants that are growing in a row or a bed. If you use a soaker hose, make sure that the hose covers all sides of the plants, not just one side. Soaker hoses water the plants slowly, so they should run long enough to soak the root ball and surrounding soil, which will vary depending on the size of the plants. For example, during hot and dry weather on plants that are 18" tall, a "sweating type" soaker hose should be left to run for at least 4 hours.
- **SPRINKLERS** - Like those that are used to water the lawn, sprinklers are also a good way to soak an entire bed of plants, especially those with a lot of annuals and perennials. Sprinklers are not, however, the best way to water individual plants because they usually spray a swath of water that is at least 20 feet long. Again, watering the plants deeply and thoroughly is the key.
- **WATERING WAND** - This is a great way to provide supplemental watering, especially for container grown plants. Container grown plants are often grown in a light bark mix which does not hold as much water and can therefore dry out more quickly than balled and burlapped plants. So in addition to using one of the watering methods described above, use the wand as needed to soak the root ball and surrounding soil thoroughly for several minutes, moving the wand over the entire root zone area. Let the water soak through for a few minutes while you move on to the next plant you are watering. Then go back and water each plant again for several minutes with the wand. Repeat as needed, depending on the size of the root ball.
- **GATOR BAGS** - These can be used to water trees during the hot and dry summer months. These bags, which can hold up to 20 gallons of water, are secured to the trunk of the tree, where they release the water slowly to the root ball over the course of 15-20 hours.

Tips on Watering:

- Remember that container grown plants tend to dry out more quickly than "balled and burlapped" plants. During periods of dry weather, use a watering wand to soak the root ball as needed.

- It is very important to water trees and shrubs thoroughly as needed during the summer months and in the late fall (November/December) before the onset of winter.
- Summer thunderstorms can provide some helpful moisture, but should not be considered a substitute for deep watering.
- Large trees can take several years to become established in the landscape. Additional watering is necessary during dry spells and summer droughts. This is especially important during the first few years to keep your trees healthy and vigorous.
- Plants that are growing in shady conditions caused by large trees can dry out more quickly because of the competition for moisture from the large tree roots.
- Wilted leaves can result from the soil being either too dry or too wet. Be sure to feel the soil to determine which scenario may be happening before watering.
- Bedding plants, hanging baskets and potted plants may need to be watered daily during the summer months. To help with this task, water-grabbing polymers such as Soil Moist can be used for these plants to reduce the frequency of watering. These polymers absorb the excess water that typically drains through the pot, holds it in a jell form and releases it to the roots when needed.