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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Soaker Hose Irrigation
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We've had a cool, damp spring into summer, if you don't count the one heat wave that dried out the seedlings. The calendar page has turned into July when we're sure to get hotter, drier weather. The best time to water is before you see signs of stress on plants, shrubs, and trees. Signs of stress such as wilting, leaf scorch and browning can indicate a lack of sufficient water; however, these symptoms are also a sign of repeated overwatering. Monitoring the amount of water applied will give you the answer to what is causing your problems. Use a trowel or pick up soil in your hand to evaluate the moisture level. You should be able to form a ball of soil and it should leave a film of soil stain on your hands. If water comes out of the soil ball, it contains too much water (WSU Master Gardener Manual).

Setting up an irrigation system is very important to consistent watering. The ease in which you can use it is worth advance planning. Hoses of various types, sprinklers, drip irrigation systems and soaker systems should be examined in the spring and set up before planting.

The purchase of a new hose is always time consuming for me. I want to consider the weight of the hose as I may be dragging it around to set sprinklers for the lawn. Last year I purchased one that was good quality, reinforced and heavier than anticipated. That hose is now assigned to supplying a soaker hose so I don't have to move it. Hoses come in several diameters, usually 5/8 or 3/4 inches, and lengths typically from 25 to 100 feet long. The longer the hose the heavier and more expensive it can be. Rubber and reinforced PVC are generally more flexible. High end reinforced hoses will be more resistant to punctures and bursts. A hose with good brass fittings is also more expensive but is of higher quality. The (permanently) coiled hoses that are usually 3/8 in diameter and come in 25 to 50 foot lengths are lighter, but tend to kink and often tangle. They may be useful when watering potted plants on a patio (Tips for buying garden hose: Washington State University) Another type of hose is a soaker hose. Generally made of rough material, water seeps out along the length of the hose. There are also sprinkler hoses, and these have a series of small holes on the top of the hose that act as a sprinkler. These two types of hoses are not interchangeable.

I live on a ridge line and receive significant wind in the afternoons on my flower gardens and raised beds. I've used soaker hoses for several years to apply water without losing it to evaporation. I lay the hoses out in a pattern that will allow them to soak the perennials and the vegetables and annuals that will be planted later. The recommended length of a soaker hose is 100 feet or less from water source to the end. I check that the hose I've laid out will transfer water from the source to the end. Some issues to look for if water isn't flowing are the length of the hose and your water pressure. If your water pressure isn't sufficient to fill the hose before it runs out, try a shorter hose. If your hose is old, and there are sections that aren't letting water out, try soaking the coiled hose in vinegar water (cup of vinegar to 5 gallons of water) to loosen impurities in your water that may have clogged the holes (limestone or iron).

It will take some time to fill the hose and for water to start seeping out. The preferred method of watering with a soaker hose is to leave it at low water pressure for an extended time. You can check the amount of water by placing a container (I use a tuna can) under the hose and measuring the amount of water that drips into it in an hour. If you're satisfied with the amount of water in the can, and the water seeps fairly evenly from the entire length of the hose, make note of the amount of pressure (how open did you turn your faucet?) so you can use that amount again.

When the hose has passed your test of distributing adequate water, and you're happy with how you've laid it out, you need to dig it into your garden bed a couple inches. Then cover it with the mulch you've placed around your plants. This keeps the water in the ground without shooting little streams up on the foliage. I've used various mulching materials. Compost, straw, bark, lawn clippings (dried out first, then used to lightly cover) to cover the hoses. Remember to recheck during the summer that the hose is watering the whole length and also the depth of the water transfer by using a trowel and digging beside the hose.

Depending on the garden beds you have, you may need multiple soaker hoses. I am still modifying my plant arrangement and like the ability to move the hoses as I move the plants. Drip irrigation systems are wonderful for conserving water and allowing differing amounts of water to water different plants, but they are more expensive and after set-up are a bit less flexible than soaker hoses.

Soaker hoses are not adequate for watering large trees and shrubs or turf grass. They need larger volumes of water.

Maintenance of your investment in your hoses starts when you first use them. When you get your hose home, lay it out straight and let it sit to warm up and take the coils out of it. Don't leave them lying on your lawn too long. They will suffer UV damage and your lawn will suffer also. Soaker hoses stay where they're put throughout the growing season and into the fall. When the season is over, remove them from the soil and lay them out on your lawn. Run water through them to clean off the particles on the outside of the hose and then pour the water out of their length and coil them and hang them inside to dry. I use a wide strap to hang them on, a hose reel, or curved hose hanger. You don't want to store any hose with a kink in it at the point you hang it. Other hoses you've used through the season need the same good care. Make sure there's no water left in their length, coil them up in a roll 24 to 36 inches minimum and hang them inside for the winter.

To yield more information contact Ferry County WSU Master Gardeners with garden practice questions, 509-775-5225, x1116, jordant@wsu.edu, 350 E. Delaware Ave. #9 Republic, WA 99166 in the basement of the Courthouse. For Extension publications go to <https://pubs.wsu.edu/>.

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