

When to Water Your Garden During Winter

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Ecosystems rely on winter snowfall as a crucial part of their yearly water supply, particularly in the west. However, when the weather seems a bit uncooperative in the precipitation department, and there are higher than normal daytime temperatures—producing more rapid transpiration— your garden may be in need of some healthy winter watering.

So what is healthy winter watering? Remember these basic tips:

- With dry weather, once a month winter watering is suggested. If the dry weather continues, you may need to go to twice monthly watering. Keep an eye on the skies.
- Water only when the air temperature is above freezing. You'll want to apply water early in the day so that it will have time to soak in before nighttime freezing. If water stands around the base of a tree it can freeze and damage the bark. Heavy coatings of ice on turfgrasses can cause suffocation or result in matting of the grass.
- Lawn grasses are prone to winter damage-especially newly planted lawns, both sod and seeded. Pay particular attention to turf on southern exposures.

If you haven't received precipitation in winter, it's crucial to water your plants. Write a reminder every three weeks on your calendar to water.

As a rule of thumb, evergreen trees need more water than deciduous ones. Any plant with shallow root systems, such as pine, spruce, non-native juniper, Euonymus and Oregon grape will be more susceptible to winter damage.

When watering woody plants that have been planted in the last two seasons, the most important area to water is the distance from halfway between the plant and the outer stretch of the branches to approximately one foot beyond the "drip line" of branch extremities. This also prevents water from building up near the trunk of the plant.

Perennials depend on snow cover in winter for hydrating their roots. Water your fall planted bulbs, such as crocus, during the winter to aid in spring growth.

The purpose of winter watering is not to provide water for the plant to draw up its stem—rather, to provide water to prevent the roots from desiccating in the cold dry ground. It can be hard to remember to water when you don't have a wilting plant as a visual clue.

Remember to water newly planted bulbs as well. By nature, a bulb stores a lot of water, which aids in its production of spring blooms. Bulbs left unwatered over the winter will not have the ability to sprout in the spring.

With winter watering during dry conditions, your plants will amply reward you for your kindness come springtime.