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Cycle-and-Soak Method of Watering

The cycle-and-soak method of watering is ideal for our clay-based soil here in Houston and offers some key benefits over one longer watering. In addition to helping to prevent water waste through run-off, it also allows water to sink deeper into the soil, helps lengthen the roots of plants, helps to prevent fertilizer/chemical runoff from our gardens and lawns, and helps you save money on your watering bill!

What is the Cycle-and-Soak Method?

The cycle-and-soak method of watering involves watering for short lengths of time, allowing a break to allow water to soak into the soil, followed by 1-2 additional short waterings with breaks as needed. A traditional single long watering session results in pooling, runoff, and only a few inches of soil becoming saturated with moisture, while a cycle-and-soak session results in little to no pooling, runoff, and allows moisture to penetrate much deeper into the soil.

How to Use the Cycle-and-Soak Method!

Start by watering an area of your garden/yard and pay close attention to how long it takes for pooling/runoff on the surface to begin. This will be the amount of time for your initial watering and is usually from 3-5 minutes depending on the current soil composition, slope, and moisture levels in that area. Once you have completed your first watering, allow the water to soak into the soil for thirty minutes to an hour. Repeat this cycle 2-3 more times to complete the watering process. The information can then be used to program irrigation systems, sprinklers, or to give you a better idea of how much water your lawn and garden require.

Why Use the Cycle-and-Soak Method?

Allowing water to permeate further into the soil offers multiple advantages over surface watering! The first, and most obvious, advantage is a reduction in water loss due to runoff and evaporation. By watering in short cycles and allowing that water to fully absorb, there is less water running onto the sidewalk/street and into the storm drain, and less pooling water means less water lost to evaporation. This means water stays where your plants need it!

Secondly, deep watering helps to push fertilizers and other nutrients deeper into the soil, allowing plants to access it over time as needed and further encouraging deep root growth. Fertilizers that stay near the surface are more likely to be flushed out in heavy rains and run off into the waterways.

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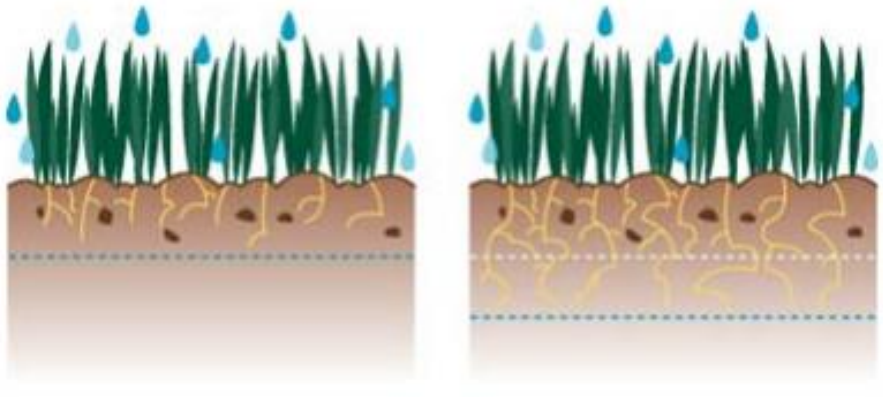
Finally, and most importantly, deeper watering encourages plants to grow deeper roots. This is the key advantage of the cycle-and-soak method, and what makes it so great for those brutal Texas summers! Plants that extend their feeder roots deeper into the ground are still able to find the water they need when the surface water has dried up. Frequent surface watering encourages roots to stay near the surface, and in times of intense heat, cold, and drought those roots are less able to find the moisture they need to keep your plants alive. Cycle-and-soak watering year-round prepares plants for many inclement weather conditions we get throughout the year.



Additional Watering Tips!

- Along with proper watering techniques, mulching can be vital to keeping gardens watered during the summer and insulated during the winter. A mulch layer of 3-4" will help prevent weeds, will help prevent moisture loss from evaporation, and helps to insulate the soil during extreme heat and cold.

- Deep watering means less frequent watering as well! While all plants and soils are slightly different, many plants will be fine with 1-2 deep waterings each week once they have been properly established.

- The ideal time to water lawns and gardens is in the morning prior to 8am. Early watering allows the soil to absorb the maximum amount of moisture without evaporation, allows leaves to dry before harsh sunlight potentially causes burning by magnifying through the water, and dries foliage relatively quickly to help prevent fungal issues from occurring.