

In Times of Drought, Using Water Twice and Critical Stage Watering

by UCCE Master Gardener Lynda Alvarez

Many gardeners have not planted a vegetable garden this season because of mandatory water restrictions. Here are strategies that may work for your home to allow a modified or mini garden plan by using water twice.

1) Carry water saved from your daily shower to your porch and nearby plants or pour into a large watering can. Place a plastic handled bucket in every shower in your house. Collect the “warm-up” water and “wet down” water. Move the bucket aside, shampoo, lather, rinse, and quickly finish your regimen. The extra work of carrying your bucket to plants will be beneficial exercise. As you conduct your walk to the garden, contemplate the many people in the world who carry ALL of their daily water.

2) Keep a large wide mouthed plastic pitcher near your kitchen sink. Place your vegetable-washing colander over the pitcher as you wash your vegetables.

3) Save water from boiling pasta or eggs, and water for steaming vegetables in this same plastic pitcher.

4) Using “Gray Water” for landscape plants is now an option. Gray water is untreated waste water from clothes washers, showers, bathtubs, sinks and laundry tubs that may be used for outdoor watering for non edibles; golf courses do this. You must check on regulations within your county.

Get More while Using Less Water

Delay the starting time of a fall garden to take advantage of the later fall rains so that you use less supplemental water. Plant only the amount that you will actually need. Plant herbs and small “patio” variety vegetables in pots. Plant shorter season crops and shop for drought resistant varieties.

UCCE Master Gardeners suggest planting water efficient edibles such as asparagus, chard, eggplant, mustard greens, peppers, roma tomatoes, and California native strawberries for the mid season garden while adding an additional layer of mulch to insulate and prevent evaporation. Weed often to keep greedy weed roots from robbing moisture from your desired plants. Water before the sun comes up and after the sun goes down using a drip system to avoid moisture loss through evaporation.

Critical Stage Watering

Learn the crucial water needs for the growth stages of your plants. There are specific times in a vegetable plant growth cycle where water is more important than other times. For many vegetables, the two-week periods after seed germination, after transplanting, and during flowering and fruiting are the most critical. Each vegetable does have its own peculiarities.

Vegetable**Crucial Period- Water Amply**

Broccoli, Kohlrabi, Brussels sprouts, Cabbage Cauliflower	head development
Beans and Peas	flower bud formation to pod enlargement
Root vegetables	root enlargement
Cucumbers and vines	fruit enlargement
Eggplant, Pepper, Tomato	flowering, fruit set, enlargement
Lettuce and Spinach	head enlargement or leaf growth
Onion	due to small root structure, needs constant even water throughout
Potato	tuber set and enlargement
Corn	tassel, silk and ear development

Perhaps, this season, by both adapting and adopting some water wise habits, you will be able to sustain your vegetable garden and reap bountiful homegrown produce.

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<https://www.ebmud.com/environment/conservation-and-recycling/recycling/graywater>
<https://byf.unl.edu/VegWaterNeeds>