

Edible Gardening Series with Sarah Bostick and Carol Wyatt-Evens UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County

Resources from Session 8: Watering Your Garden

Instructional articles:

- **Watering the Vegetable Garden (UF article):**
 - <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/watering-the-vegetable-garden.html>
- **Irrigation:**
 - <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/irrigation/>
- **Watering the Vegetable Garden (UMN article):**
 - <https://extension.umn.edu/water-wisely-start-your-own-backyard/watering-vegetable-garden#too-much-water-869314>
- **Irrigating (Watering) Your Vegetable Garden:**
 - https://wrcc.dri.edu/washoeEt/docs/Irrigating_Garden.pdf
- **Building and Operating and Home Garden Irrigation System:**
 - <https://extension.psu.edu/building-and-operating-a-home-garden-irrigation-system>
- **Drip Irrigation for Home Gardens:**
 - <https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden/drip-irrigation-home-gardens-4-702/>
 - Sidenote: this is a very technical article, but great if you like technical! At the end of the article is a glossary of irrigation supply terms that is quite handy.
- **How Much Water Does My Food Garden Need?:**
 - <http://sonomamg.ucanr.edu/files/185639.pdf>
 - This article does the math for you!

Answers to a few of the questions asked during Q&A

Question: Are there some native crops I can plant that will use less water than more common garden vegetables?

Answer: Kind of! This is a great article that a UF faculty member wrote for Vegetable and Specialty Crop News Magazine (a magazine that is distributed throughout Florida, Georgia, and Alabama): <https://vscnews.com/florida-native-plants-tomorrows-fruits-vegetables/>. The article is called *Florida Native Plants — Tomorrow's Fruits and Vegetables?* and it does a great job of laying out the history of edible plants in Florida.

Although there are not long lists of native Florida edibles, there are lists of drought-tolerant edible plants from around the world, many of which will thrive in Florida (and most of the US!). This is a southern California list of drought-tolerant and low-water need fruits and vegetables: <https://www.change-making.com/drought-tolerant-food-plants/>.

As a general rule of thumb, some of the easiest, most drought-tolerant veggies and herbs that are commonly eaten in the US are from dry parts of the world. Think Mediterranean and dry regions of Mexico and South America. One of my favorite little-known herbs is actually very, very common in the countries south of us: *culantro*. It tastes very similar to cilantro but without the soapy flavor that some people taste in cilantro. It looks absolutely nothing like cilantro and thrives in pretty much any growing condition you put it in.

Question: How often should you add fertilizer to your watering?

Answer: This is a great question and one that we will dive into on Monday, Dec. 7th, 2020 in our next Edible Gardening Series class (topic: fertilizing your garden). Like so many things in gardening, this simple question doesn't have a simple answer. Some gardeners use dry, granular fertilizers and others use liquid fertilizers. Recommendations for fertilizing differ significantly across brands, types, uses, and more. The best recommendation: follow the instructions on your fertilizer's packaging very closely. And remember that more is not better!

Question: For a hot, humid climate that gets very heavy rain events, is it better to use a digital or analog irrigation timer?

Answer: Most timers on the market are now digital and most timers that are made with home gardeners in mind are built to withstand significant rain. Check the details on the packaging to make sure that it is rain-proof. If you are concerned with the longevity of your timer during our intense rainy season, you can create a simple DIY cover for your timer that deflects most or all of the rain (I've seen covers as simple as taping a Tupperware lid over the top of the timer!). Most of the digital timers that are intended for open-air use do have a minimum/maximum temperature range. Most cannot withstand freezing temperatures and many will be damaged by the combination of very high summer temperatures and direct sunlight. If you live in a very hot climate, it is a good idea to create some shade for your timer.

Question: There are dark spots on my basil – is this caused by water on the basil leaves?

Answer: There are many bacterial, viral, and fungal diseases in basil, but the four most commonly found in Florida are downy mildew, leaf spot, bacterial leaf spot, and fusarium wilt. Here is a UF document that describes each disease and the best methods for controlling them: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp113>. Based on how a few of you described the spots on your basil – “nasty!” – my best sight-unseen guess is that the dark spots are caused by bacterial leaf spot. Bacterial leaf spot is spread by infected seeds and made worse by wet, humid conditions. It can spread rapidly from plant to plant from the splashing of infected soil up onto plants, direct contact of a healthy plant with an infected plant or your hands – if you touch an infected plant and then a healthy plant, the bacteria can transfer. Once you have diseased plants, the best plan is to remove the plants from your garden and start anew with healthy seedlings in a different part of your garden. And you should cover that soil with mulch!

Question: What are signs that my plants are getting too much or not enough water?

Answer: Rather than write up this answer myself, I'm going to share this humorous article from LSU called *Plant CSI: Death By Dehydration or Drowning*: <https://www.lsuagcenter.com/profiles/rbogren/articles/page1567783731916>. It tells you everything you need to know!

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