



Drip irrigation in the home garden

Drip irrigation is most commonly associated with horticulture or viticulture operations. But it has huge application for home gardeners as well. Drip is the most water efficient of all irrigation systems. It delivers a slow trickle of water that seeps deep into the soil reaching the plant's root system.

With drip irrigation, thin, flexible tubing with drippers integrated into it or manually inserted on it, carries water to a garden bed or individual plants. To work out how much drip tube you need, first calculate your garden's daily water needs during the peak of the summer, and then design your drip irrigation to deliver that amount. Options include the relatively inexpensive drip tape or more robust drip tubing.

Drip systems are ideal for raised garden beds, potted plants, hanging baskets, trees, bushes and shrubs. Because water is applied at a slow and gentle rate, drip delivers the highest efficiency. Drip is also not affected by wind, meaning once you've set up your irrigation, weather conditions will have minimal impact on it.

Here are considerations for setting up your drip irrigation system.

- ◆ Drip systems can operate at a range of pressures but are ideally suited to low pressure conditions.
- ◆ To choose the right drip system, think about your soil type and how much water your plants need. Heavy soils such as clays retain much moisture; any water applied also spreads sideways, meaning wider dripper spacings with longer but infrequent waterings work well. In sandy, lighter soils drippers need to be placed closer together and watering needs to occur by applying small amounts more frequently.
- ◆ Water emitters like drip spikes and micro-sprinklers can be used for plants that require more water. Drip spikes are particularly helpful for vegetables like tomatoes and cucumbers. They can be placed at the base of each plant feeding them directly, and leave no water on the plants surface to evaporate.
- ◆ Drip systems are easy to expand or adjust as needed. Lengths of tube can be added to lines at any time, even after the initial installation is complete. Although depending on the size of the drip tube and the dripper flow rates there are maximum tube lengths that can be used. You can also easily remove lines by unclamping the components. A screwdriver is often all you need to adjust systems.
- ◆ To install a dripper system, you will need to do a flow test to determine the maximum length of dripline that you can run.
- ◆ For many gardeners, the freedom drip irrigation offers far outweighs the time it takes to install these systems and their upfront cost.

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