

Water Saving Tips for Vegetable Gardens

By [E. Vinje](#)

How to save water in your vegetable garden while making sure your plants get what they need.

We've talked a lot about water-wise gardening, drought-tolerant plants, and the like, all good things. Conserving water is *always* a good thing, especially when you're paying for it. But there's one place where skimping on watering can have bad consequences, where thirsty plants will drink up water more quickly than anywhere else and that's your vegetable garden. Let's face it. Vegetables are water intensive. It takes 16 gallons to grow a single head of lettuce. It's estimated that 40% of all water use in the United States goes to growing food.

So, while vegetable gardens will drink up more water than your thyme and lavender-planted rock garden or your native grass lawn, it's water well spent. But that doesn't mean you can't conserve water while growing vegetables. Here's some tips, gathered from a variety of sources to help you save water when you're giving your vegetables what they need. Most of these techniques are second nature for experienced gardeners. But they bare repeating.

Six Ways to Save Water in Your Vegetable Garden

1. **Get rid of your sprinkler.** Sure, there's nothing easier than setting out your rotating or oscillating sprinkler in the garden and letting it go. But much of the water you're using is evaporating before it can soak into the ground, some of it before it even hits the ground. A sprinkler wets down leaves and make them vulnerable to molds, blights, and fungus. Plants including beans and squash are particularly susceptible to this. Why endanger your plant's health *and* waste water at the same time?
2. **Mulch.** Not only does it keep down weeds and — depending on what you use — return organic materials to your soil, it slows water evaporation. Mulching, done right, is a win-win-win. Make sure your mulch is weed-seed free so as not to spread trouble. But even if a few weeds do come up, they're usually easy to pull from mulch-covered soil.
3. **[Add lots of compost to your soil.](#)** The more organic matter in your soil, the more it will retain moisture. Soil quality is the key to growing.
4. **Water only when your plants need it.** If your garden is large, this could be at different times in different parts of your plot. How do you know when it's time to water? Stick your finger in the soil. It should be dry down to the first knuckle and beyond and only moist much further than that. Then water thoroughly. It's common knowledge that less-frequent, deep waterings, down to six inches or so, are better than frequent light drinks which don't encourage plants to root deeply. The deeper the roots the longer between waterings for your plants. Water at the beginning of the day before the peak evaporation hours. You can also water at the end of the day but that doesn't often allow enough time for it to evaporate off leaves where mildew and other problems might start.
5. **Use a watering can.** Of course, this is impractical for those with large gardens and will take more time even in a smaller garden. But it's an amazing water saver, pinpointing the watering right to where you need it and in just the right amounts. And going around with a watering can gets you up close and intimate with your plants allowing you to spot

insects and other problems while hand watering. Looking for a quicker method? Try a watering wand. Soaker hoses are also a good idea.

6. **Plant vegetables that use a lot of water close to each other.** Yes, with all the other rotation and companion planting considerations you make when designing your garden, this may not be easy. But planting, say tomatoes nearby melons or corn, your water will be doing double duty. After that lettuce goes your tomato plants will be well established plants.

There are all kinds of tricks for conserving water while growing a vegetable garden, try implanting one or two of these techniques each season and watch your garden grow.