

Ninewells Community Garden

Retaining Water in your garden beds & containers

Life gets in the way and we can all forget to water our plants from time to time especially during a sudden warm spell. But if the garden beds and containers are set up in a way to best retain water then we don't need to worry so much. Using some of these techniques will help to save water and reduce plant stress levels. It also means that you won't need to water as often which is better for soil quality as it can become compacted when watered too much or too often.

Mulch

The best thing for both your regular garden beds and for raised beds is mulch. This helps to retain moisture by preventing it from evaporating. It will also help regulate soil temperature during those warmer spells. And as a bonus, it will also suppress weeds. Mulch can be composed of a number of different organic materials such as bark, shredded paper or cardboard, straw, dead leaves and wood chips. The best time to do this is in early spring to take advantage of the fact that weeds have not yet taken hold. Autumn is also ideal as the mulch will protect plant roots from extremes of temperature over the winter.



Soil additions

In containers, consider adding a new ingredient into the soil mix. A bit of vermiculite, sphagnum (peat) moss or coconut coir will all help retain moisture in the soil. Although you certainly don't need all three at once.

Lining containers

You may wish to line certain types of containers such as hanging baskets which are especially prone to drying out fast. This can be something as easy to obtain as a plastic bag. Just remember to poke some holes in the bottom for drainage.

Positioning

If your garden is still a work in progress, (and let's be honest... who's isn't!?) then you can consider positioning certain parts of it in a way that will help to conserve water. Make sure raised beds are built within stretching distance of the hose. And when planting, pair up shade or semi-shade loving plants under other more sun loving ones such as lettuce under tomato plants. If you have the room then planting taller plants or even trees will also help by creating a canopy layer thereby providing some shelter from too much sun or wind.

Other Resources

This articles goes into more depth on why improving water retention is so helpful for plants:
(<https://plantcareforbeginners.com/articles/how-to-make-your-soil-retain-more-water>)

This RHS article goes into a lot more detail on mulching:
(<https://www.rhs.org.uk/soil-composts-mulches/mulch>)

