Watering Guidelines

Proper watering procedures are important for the establishment and long term health of your plants. Unfortunately, because there are so many variables with soil, plant type, location and weather conditions, no hard and fast rule will apply to every plant or situation. Here are some general guidelines and watering principals that can be used to care for your plants.

Soil Type - The watering guidelines outlined here consider a sandy loam soil as the middle range or average type of soil.   Clay soil generally requires less water while a sandy soil requires an increase the amount of recommended water.

Moisture - Plant roots thrive in moist soil.   Too much water for extended periods of time can be as deadly as not enough water. <u>DO NOT</u> water so frequently that the soil is always wet. Allow the soil to partially dry out between watering.   When you do, watering deeply will encourage roots to grow into the surrounding soils helping them to establish sooner.

Weather conditions - Temperature, wind and sun all play a part in the speed in which a plant, especially a newly planted one, will dry out. Hot windy days when rain has been sparse will result in plants drying out faster than calm sunny days in the 70's during a rainy period.   Spring and fall when the temperatures are generally cooler and the soil often stays wet longer, require less watering then mid-July with upper 80 degree weather and there has been no rain in two weeks.   It is important to ensure your plants do not go into the winter dry, so continue to monitor and water plants until around the end of November.

Plant size - Small new plants like ground covers or summer annuals have small root systems that dry out quickly.   Be sure to water thoroughly when newly planted and check regularly for the next several months. Depending on temperature, they may require water every day to every 2-3 days.
Perennials - Initially check them on a daily basis as their root mass are still very small, however, generally speaking they do not require a lot of water, so, check the soil 1-2" down to determine soil moisture and water when dry.

Shrubs - An average shrub requires about an inch of water a week. Yews or roses may require less while a hydrangea or sweetspire will require more. If watering by hand, place a hose at the base of the plant and allow it to slowly dribble on the plant for around 20 minutes once or twice a week depending on temperature, soil etc. If it is under irrigation, set the mist heads to around 5-10 minutes per watering couple times a week. The goal is to get the entire root ball well watered each time you water and allow to dry out somewhat between watering.

Trees - A general rule of thumb is around an inch of water per caliper inch of trunk per week. The caliper inch of a tree is the diameter of the trunk around a foot above the soil level. Like shrubs, a hose placed at the base of the tree with a slow dribble that soaks into the soil for around an hour or so to get moisture all the way through the ball of the tree.   Red Maples, River Birch, Dawn Redwood all may require twice as much water then more drought tolerant trees like Oaks or Honey Locust.

Evergreen Trees and Shrubs - It is important to continue to water most evergreen trees and shrubs until the ground freezes which is often around Christmas. Depending on weather watering every week or two will help protect against winter burn during the windy cold months.

During the first year after your new plants have been installed, they will require the most attention but it can take up to 5 years to get them fully established so in times of high temperatures and/or little rain check your plants and give them some water.

Sod - Generally speaking, established turf requires around an inch of water a week but newly installed sod requires more water. Sod dries out quickly until it is fully rooted. If the weather is in the upper 80s-90s, your newly installed sod may need to be watered 2 (sometimes 3) times a day for a couple of weeks or until the weather cools. The root zone for sod is very thin and exposed so it can change from moist to dry in a short time on a hot sunny day. Like trees and shrubs, constantly soggy wet roots can be just as detrimental to establishment as overly dry. After 2-3 weeks during the growing season, sod usually has started to established roots into the surrounding soils so you can water less frequency but apply more water per application.   Watering procedures for new sod vary depending on the season. Often, in the spring or fall with rainier weather patterns and cooler temperatures, watering your sod once daily or every other day for the first 3 weeks may all that will be required.   After a month, water once a day or every other day to eventually once or twice a week depending on the season.

Establishing Grass Seed – The key to getting grass seed to germinate is constantly moist soil in the top inch of soil for around two weeks. Unlike sod that requires heavy watering, grass seed requires light frequent watering several times a day to keep the soil constantly moist. Since most grass is a blend of several different types of seed, you may see new grass in just a few days but it can take two weeks for all of the Kentucky Blue Grass blends to germinate. It is for this reason, spring and fall are often the best time to plant grass seed because the cooler temperatures and rainier weather patterns work with you to keep the soil constantly moist. After the seed has germinated, watering can be reduced to less frequent but more water per application as the root system grows and becomes more established.