

WATER WISDOM

THE BEST TIME TO WATER

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Some crops respond to water at a certain time in their growth cycle. Take care, however, as too much water can spoil the flavour of some vegetables.

Beetroot Well-watered beetroot produces masses of leaves and a small crop. In dry weather, water alongside the row every two weeks to prevent the soil from drying out. A tablespoon of salt added to each can of water enhances both the yield and the flavour.

Broad beans Watering during early stages of growth produces leaves at the expense of pods. Water when the first flowers appear and again when the pods begin to swell; water weekly in dry season.

Brussels sprouts Once established, only water during exceptionally dry summers.

Calabrese If water is scarce, a single watering two or three weeks before harvest gives the best possible return.

Carrots and Parsnips Both produce leaves at the expense of roots if given too much water. Watering (or rain) after the soil dries out causes roots to split. A careful balance is required; in very dry weather give 11 litres per sq metre (2 gal per sq yd) every two weeks.

Cauliflowers If possible, water once a week. If water is scarce, a single watering two or three weeks before harvest gives the best possible return. Winter cauliflower and sprouting broccoli shouldn't need watering.

Celeriac In very dry weather, water once a week.

Celery Regular watering is essential to prevent the sticks becoming stringy. Apply up to 20 litres per sq m (4 gal per sq yd) during the height of summer.

Chicory Best left unwatered to encourage deep rooting. In very dry seasons water every two weeks or more often if wilting.

Courgettes and Marrows These require a lot of water and may need watering twice a week in dry weather. Sink a pot alongside the plant and fill as many times as necessary to keep the soil moist.

Cucumbers, ridge Water regularly into empty pots sunk alongside, throughout flowering and fruiting.

Endive Need to be well supplied. Water once a week in dry weather.

Florence fennel Must not dry out or will run to seed before forming a bulb. Water weekly in dry weather; it's more effective applied at the base of the plant than sprayed over the foliage.

French beans Too much water when young produces leaves at the expense of pods. When the crop begins to flower, water frequently to increase pod production and quality. Watering also delays the onset of stringiness.

Garlic No need to water.

Globe artichokes Established plants only require water in exceptionally dry summers.

Jerusalem artichokes One or two waterings in a dry August will improve yield.

Kale Water thoroughly at transplanting; no need for further watering.

Kohl rabi Watering is not normally required once established.

Leeks Water weekly until established; further watering is not normally required.

Lettuces Watering improves size and quality. Water twice weekly; if water is in short supply, give a single watering 10 days before harvest.

Onions Require little watering as they are deep rooted. Watering after mid-July will delay ripening and the bulbs won't store well.

Peas Water when they come into flower and water again when the pods begin to swell.

Potatoes One good watering on new potatoes when the tubers are the size of small marbles makes a big difference. Scratch away a little of the soil to check the size of the tubers.

Radishes Too much water gives a lot of leaf and poor roots. Soak the bottom of the drill before sowing and leave the crop unwatered except in very dry weather. Radish is very likely to bolt in hot weather – with or without watering.

Runner beans These need at least twice as much water as most other crops. A double row needs 22 litres per m (4 gal per yd) each week. This amount is of course reduced in wet weather.

Salsify and scorzerona No need to water as very deep rooted.

Shallots Best left unwatered once established.

Spinach Frequent watering is necessary for high quality rapid growth. Water weekly in hot, dry weather.

Summer cabbages These will be half as large again if the soil is soaked two weeks before harvest. 22 litres per sq m (4 gal per sq yd) is needed for this effect, more water than this may cause the hearts to split.

Sweetcorn Cobs are improved in both size and quality if watered when the male tassels first form and again as the cobs are swelling.

Swiss chard Has a deep tap root and should only require watering in very dry conditions.

Tomatoes Good watering is an important part of tomato production. Too much water and the flavour is impaired; too little and the fruits get blossom end rot. In dry weather water outdoor tomatoes twice a week with 10 litres per sq m (2 gal per sq yd).

Turnips Water in early stages of growth if the soil is becoming too dry. Watering increases size but reduces flavour.