

The Tool Shed



By Mary Mason and Pat Davis, URI Master Gardeners

Watering is an art and gardeners, like artists, must choose the techniques and tools that best produce a masterpiece. There are many automatic sprinkler and drip irrigation systems available but we are going to discuss only do it yourself watering tools. The watering can, nozzle, sprinkler, and hose are the basic watering tools most gardeners use.

Watering Can: Water weighs about 8 pounds a gallon so expect quite a workout if you opt for the traditional galvanized steel watering can. Lightweight plastic watering cans are a good practical alternative. When buying a watering can check it out completely: is the rose removable so you can use the spout or the spray; is the can balanced when you carry it full; does it have both a top and side handle; are there any rough edges on the carrying handle?

Nozzle: New style and shaped nozzles arrive on the market each season. Pistol grips that can produce various spray patterns and lock in an "on" position make watering easier on the hand and wrist. Recent improvements in the fire hose twist style nozzle have reinvigorated it as a choice. Several companies have developed a system of quick lock attachments. With just a click you can change from a spray nozzle to a sprinkler. Most of these companies' products are interchangeable, but ask your dealer before you mix brands. I like this concept but I have had leaking with all of these type products.

Sprinklers and Hoses: There is a huge variety of sprinklers, weeping hoses, and sprinkler hoses that help accomplish the watering task with little effort on your part. Consider the size and shape of your yard or garden and spend some time comparing options to find the best bet for your situation. I have several sprinklers to fit various spaces and it really makes the task easier and wastes less water when you have a good fit. Consider placing a soaker/weeper hose under the mulch either through or around a garden when you first plant it. Leave the connector accessible so you can just attach a hose and water the whole garden without disrupting the garden or watering unintended areas. Electronic and manual timers are also available at reasonable costs and can help control watering needs, especially during dry periods.

Most gardeners do have a hose and use it often. For many the fight they have with the hose is more work than weeding. There are some fairly easy steps you can take to ease the burden of a hose war. (1) Try hose guards in front of tender plants and favorite shrubs that can get damaged when the hose gets pulled by them. (2) Consider a "Y" connector and second hose if you have gardens in two separate areas that share the same faucet. (3) Bury a hose under the lawn or garden then attach it to a free standing faucet at the far end of the garden to allow for watering without the long haul to the back forty.

Hose recommendations: Often times the real problem is the hose itself. The best advice is to buy the best hose you can afford. The material the hose is manufactured from and the number of layers or plies of material in the hose determine performance and wear. Cheap plastic single- or double-ply hoses are not going to give you adequate water delivery, will kink, and often only last one or two seasons. Kinks slow down the watering process and weaken the hose, making it more prone to leaking and bursting. Three- to five-ply hoses usually give you the best flexibility and resistance to kinks and abrasion. Rubber hoses are more sun damage resistant but can be heavy and difficult to wind up. The best way to judge a hose is to bend and twist it to see how it reacts. If it kinks easily now just think of what you will be dealing with in the garden. Most dealers will open a hose package to let you feel what you are getting. Know what you want from a hose, listen to recommendations, but lift it, twist it, get to know it before you bring it home.

Use a 5/8-inch diameter hose. Most garden hoses carry a pressure of 30-90 psi. A 5/8-inch hose waters in about one-third the time of a 1/2-inch hose. Brass fittings should be heavyweight and have an octagonal shape (the shape helps give a better grip for hands or wrench).

Hose care: When rolling up a hose, do it in a figure-8...less stress and less apt to develop kinks. Avoid wrought iron single point hose hangers. The single pressure point can cause blemishes and weak spots which cause kinks. Try to keep your hose stored out of the sun in summer. Totally drain it before putting it away for the winter.