

Soaker Hoses



Soaker hoses are easy to install and maintain.

Buying Soaker Hoses

Soaker hoses look like black garden hoses, with fittings to screw onto your outdoor faucet. They come in various lengths, which can be screwed together to create runs of up to 100 feet. Y-type shutoff valves or 4-way hose splitters can be used to create multiple watering zones of less than 100 feet total each. Or some garden stores sell kits and parts to connect pieces of soaker hose together, giving you greater flexibility in your design and water efficiency.

For any soaker hose, check the package or ask a salesperson to see if it has a pressure rating. High water pressure can cause some soaker hoses to flood the soil or burst. If necessary, test your water pressure with an inexpensive gauge sold at many stores and, if needed, purchase a pressure regulator or flow reducer along with the soaker hose. You can also regulate flow by only opening the faucet part way, then checking to see that water is seeping out all the way to the end of the soaker hose. You might also want to add a timer to make it easy to time your watering. Simple timers are available that screw right onto the faucet.

Tips for Installing Soaker Hoses

Choosing the Best Locations Soaker hoses work well for shrub, tree and perennial beds, and annual flower or vegetable gardens. But they are not for lawns. They are great for watering odd-shaped beds that sprinklers don't fit.

Connecting to Your Faucet Screw a Y-type shutoff valve onto your faucet, then connect the soaker hose (or a garden hose section leading to the soaker hose) to one branch of the "Y". That leaves the other branch of the "Y" to hook up a regular hose when you need it or a second soaker for a different bed. Some stores and catalogs sell fittings to connect cut pieces of soaker hose with sections of solid plastic tubing or garden hose. This lets you put water on planting beds or individual trees and shrubs without wasting water in between. If needed, screw the pressure regulator onto the faucet first, or use a flow reducer that fits like a gasket directly into the end of the hose. Add a timer if desired.

Laying Out the Hose in Your Garden Beds Wind soaker hoses through beds to get water near to each plant. In perennial beds, run hoses about 18 inches (sandy soils) to 24 inches (clay soil) apart. The water will spread underground, so only 50% of the root zone needs to get wet. For annual plants space the runs closer, 12-18 inches apart, to make sure water reaches their shallow roots. On slopes, run across the slope, not up and down.

Covering the Hose with Mulch After testing the soaker hose to see that it waters the area well, cover it with 2 inches (or more) of mulch, such as wood chips, bark, leaves, or compost. The mulch keeps water from evaporating and helps spread the water flow.

If planting a new bed, prepare the soil with compost and place the plants first, then lay out the soaker hose, test, and cover with mulch.

Watering for Plant Health and Conservation

Start out by running your soaker hose for about 40 minutes once a week, or 20 minutes twice a week for sandy soils or for annual plants and gardens that have shallower roots. The key is to wet the soil in the plant's root zone. You can tell if the plant is getting enough water by digging a hole with a trowel to see if the root zone is wet (wait a while after watering before you check, so the water has time to soak in). Leaves may droop a little on hot days but if they stay droopy after the hottest part of the day, they're probably too dry—water a little longer or more often. Check the soil first, though—drooping can also be a sign of overwatering! Once you've got it figured out, a simple hose-end timer makes it easy to water the right amount consistently.

Remember...Most plants don't need extra water once they're established! Choose the right plant for the right place-which means selecting plants that are well adapted to our local climate and the conditions in your yard. "Drought-tolerant" or "low-water-use" plants only need watering for the first 1-3 years while their root system develops. Then they do fine with little or no additional watering. Soaker hoses work well during this initial establishment period. Even higher water use plants will need much less after the first couple years. The key is to water deeply but infrequently, to develop deep, strong roots.

Maintaining Your Soaker Hose System

- Once or twice a year, unscrew the end caps and flush out any accumulated sediment.
- If left in the sun, a soaker hose will deteriorate after 2-3 years. Covering it with mulch will protect it from the sun. Flushing it at the start of the year will help you check for leaks, and ensure that it's not plugged and still distributing water to all the plants.
- Make sure everyone working in the garden knows the soaker is there under the mulch, so they don't accidentally damage it. Most cuts or nicks can be fixed with connectors and hose clamps, available from garden centers that sell soaker hose.

Questions? Please call Utilities at 425-452-4127.