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TITLE: DRIP IRRIGATION SAVES WATER

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For vigorous plant growth, water conservation and better disease control, drip watering systems are hard to beat.

Drip watering systems are tremendous for home hardeners. They cut water consumption by one-half or more – a big advantage with the rising cost of water.

Drip systems range from the very simple and inexpensive, to complex systems costing hundreds. But they all have one thing in common: they use water efficiently by allowing it to seep slowly into the soil only where it's needed – around plant roots. There is no water runoff or evaporation which can account for up to 50 percent of water loss with sprinkler systems.

Most vegetables have a root zone from 12 to 18 inches deep. With overhead sprinklers, there is so much water runoff and evaporation that deep roots may go without needed moisture even when they're watered regularly.

Another big advantage of drip watering over sprinkler systems is disease control. Wet foliage, especially at night, develops funguses and leaf diseases like powdery mildew. Drip watering eliminates this problem by applying water directly into the soil, well beneath plant leaves.

There are two basic ways to install a drip system. The best method is to run an underground line from the water source to the garden area. Then run drip hoses from the main line to drip hoses in each bed or row. Using twin-walled drip hoses will allow you to run longer lengths of hose without losing pressure along the way somewhere.

The alternative is simply to run a garden hose from the water source to the garden area and hook it to a drip hose. This method requires more labor because the main hose must be moved from bed to bed for watering, but it's the least expensive form of drip watering.