

Irrigation Systems & Holiday watering options

There are many options for irrigation systems which can help save you time watering your garden, and help with periods where you are away from your garden for a few days at a time.

Many irrigation systems are designed for polytunnels and greenhouses – as these covered growing areas will not benefit from any rain and also the atmosphere is usually much hotter inside and soil will dry out much faster. If your plants are not kept well watered in the heat of your polytunnel / greenhouse then they will provide low yields at best, and will die at worst. Therefore attention must be paid to how you will water your polytunnel / greenhouse plants regularly. If you are going to be away on holiday, you may find the best option is to ask someone to come and water your plants regularly. If you have plants in containers, and a hot, dry spell is forecast, you may wish to move the containers to a shady area. If you wish to have some more automated systems to help, then here are some other options to consider:

Capillary Matting / Watering

Here plants are sat on top of a thin mat made of cotton or polyester which holds a few litres of water per square metre. Water is sucked up from the mat by the soil which then results in the roots getting wet as required. You can water the mat by hand (rather than watering the plants themselves) or the mat can be hung into a water reservoir a few inches below, and it will suck up water until it is saturated or the reservoir runs dry.

Soaker pipe

Lay-flat and perforated hoses that allow water to seep along the length, may be attached to either mains supply or to a water butt. You would want to have the tap turned on for a period to give the soil a good soak and then turn off again. This may work well with a timer. You may find that they are not easy to move about without damaging plants.

Dripper irrigation systems

Connecting to either mains or water butts, this uses a system of pipes which you lay around your planted area, and then place pegs with drippers into the soil close to your plants. Many types of these are available, and many dripper systems allow you to adjust the flow of water at each point to match the needs of the particular plants.



Clay peg dripper irrigation system in polytunnel

Plastic Bottle Dripper spikes

There are simple dripper spikes available which require an old drinks bottle to act as a reservoir. You place the spike into the ground, and water is gradually released into the soil. Alternatively, you can pierce holes in the lid of a used drinks bottle and submerge this into the ground – and experiment with the size of hole needed to give a good rate of flow

Reservoir bags

Large plastic bags are available which can be filled with several litres of water. These can then be hung up inside your greenhouse or polytunnel, and connected to pipes and drippers to keep your plants well watered. These are useful if you have plants in areas which are not near to your water butts or mains supply.

Water Timer

A Garden water timer can be used with any drip irrigation system to water the plants at specific times of day and for set durations. It is connected directly to the hosepipe which is in turn connected to your mains supply (or to a water butt). This can also be used to refill the reservoir of water used by capillary matting systems leaving you able to leave your greenhouse unchecked for many days safe in the knowledge that everything should be fine. Very simple and very complex timers are available from £10 to many hundreds of pounds.

Solar timers

As with the timers above, it is possible to get a device to fit to your mains or water butt which will switch on and off according to day light.

Suppliers

Here are just a selection of websites where irrigation products are available (search “irrigation”, “drippers”, “holiday watering”, “watering systems”):

- <http://www.twowests.co.uk>
- <http://www.dobies.co.uk>
- <http://www.harrodhorticultural.com>
- <Http://www.gfonic>
- <http://www.primrose-london.co.uk/>
- <http://www.simplycontrol.com>
- <http://www.greenhousesensation.co.uk>