6 Reasons Why You Need to Use a Soaker Hose

Do you water your garden with an overhead system? For instance, do you use a sprinkler setup? Or, do you water manually with a wand? If so, learn a better and smarter method to water your garden -- a soaker hose.

A soaker hose's tubing has a unique design, which simplifies irrigation. Furthermore, it dispenses water efficiently.

You can easily water a sprawling garden. You can even assign a soaker hose to water separate trees, shrubs, and landscape beds. Here are six merits of soaker hoses and tips for installing them.

What is a Soaker Hose?

Picture this -- a flexible garden hose made from plastic and rubber that is extruding by a machine, creating a porous hose. The hose connects to your outdoor water spigot and rests on top of your soil. You can place the hose parallel to a garden row or weave it around a planting.

When you run the water at a low rate, it seeps through the pores in the tubing. This way, water targets the roots of your plants, optimizing water intake.

Soaker hoses need steady water pressure. For this reason, they work best on level ground. Does your garden sit on a slight grade? In that case, lay the hose across the slope horizontally. With this placement, gravity will draw the water toward your plants.

Soaker Hose Advantages

Here are six ways a soaker hose outshines overhead watering.

1. Low-Cost Setup

One option is buying a soaker hose kit. These kits have all the parts you need for installation. Generally, kits include a porous hose, connectors, hole plugs, and wire pins for hose anchoring. The perforated tubing comes in a coiled roll, which you cut to your desired lengths.

You'll find it easy to assemble the parts, connect the hoses, and position them. You won't need to hire an irrigation specialist. As such, a soaker hose setup is very cheap.

Conversely, drip irrigation is more complex. To self-install a 100-foot system, you'd spend $80 to $100 for the materials. For professional installation, the total cost averages $320.

2. Conserves Water

With an overhead system, you lose some water to evaporation. Further waste occurs if water lands on a sidewalk or driveway, puddling there. When spraying water with a wand or sprinkler, wind can interfere. In that case, water can bypass your plants.

Now, with a soaker hose, the water goes straight to your soil. With this direct delivery, plant roots can access water immediately!

For the sake of durability, always bury a soaker hose under 2 inches of mulch. Otherwise, the material bakes in the sun, causing cracks and leaks. Moreover, mulch helps your soil hold water, minimizing evaporation.

Meanwhile, all the water you're conserving equals money saved! If you connect soaker hoses to a timer, your watering costs should be lower still.

3. Averts Fungal Disease

Since soaker hoses don't wet plant leaves, they're less prone to mold and mildew. Simultaneously, the hoses diminish the chances of root rot. That's because they distribute water slowly and evenly through your soil.

With an overhead system, water can build in the soil, attracting root fungus. If the ground gets overly saturated, its oxygen levels plummet. Dwindling oxygen is deadly for plant roots.

On the other hand, soaker hoses keep your soil from getting waterlogged.

4. Curbs Soil Erosion

Rapid water delivery disturbs your soil, potentially washing it from your garden beds. Pounding droplets can also displace your seeds. Since water oozes from a soaker hose, your soil and seeds stay put.

If your garden occupies a slope, spread soaker hoses across the hill. With this strategic layout, you'll counter soil erosion.

5. Saves Time and Effort

After installing soaker hoses during spring, you don't need to move them until fall.

With sprinkler watering, you must position and dismantle the fixture with every use. Other methods of overhead watering are likewise time-consuming. This is true whether you use a wand, garden hose, watering can, or bucket.

6. Multi-Zone Watering

From a single outdoor spigot, soaker hoses can water a massive garden!

Does your plot have two sections? If so, install a "Y valve" on your faucet. Then, attach two soaker hoses, one for each zone. To maintain a consistent flow, water one section at a time. Also, for best results, limit your hose lengths to 100 feet.

If you have four zones to water, buy a four-way faucet adapter. Then, connect a soaker hose to each port, equipped with a separate control dial.

Hose Construction

Typically, soaker hoses come in three types of materials:

- Recycled rubber, an eco-friendly choice
- A combo of polyethylene plastic and rubber
- BPA-free polyurethane

Before trying to position a soaker hose, ask someone to help you unroll and stretch it. Then, lay the tubing in the sun for a half-hour or so. The sun's warmth will relax the coil, facilitating placement.

Attachments

Backflow Prevention

Note that if your water pressure suddenly drops, the hose water can flow backward. For instance, if a firefighter opens a hydrant on your street, water pressure can plunge.

If the outgoing water heads back to your faucet, it can enter your household water pipe. In that case, it'll contaminate your drinking water.

Is your spigot a new model? If so, check the manufacturer's specifications. It may have a built-in backflow prevention device.

If not, you'll need to buy one, called a "backflow preventer" or "backflow valve." This protective part connects a soaker hose to your outdoor spigot. Then, when the valve senses reversed water flow, it closes your water line.

Pressure Regulator

Your soaker hose should drip water slowly. If your water pressure is high, the tubing will spurt water rather than seep. The force can even split your hose. Or, water can surge at the front of the tube and trickle toward the end.

In most cases of high water pressure, you can reduce it by tightening your spigot. If not, buy a pressure regulator. This device screws into the backflow preventer, giving you better control of the flow rate.

Timer

You can run your soaker hose system on a timer. You can even buy a multi-zone digital timer, such as one powering four soaker hoses!

With all types, the timer attaches to your outdoor faucet. Then, you program the watering cycles, specifying the days and times to start and stop the water flow. The timer will turn your water on and off automatically.

How to Install a Soaker Hose

Here are some points to keep in mind. For detailed instructions, follow the link at the end of this section.

1. When cutting the hose, don't exceed lengths of 100 feet. Otherwise, water pressure won't be uniform throughout the hose segment.

2. If using multiple hoses, space them according to your soil type:

- Sandy - keep tubing 12 to 18 inches apart
- Clay or loam - lay lines 18 to 24 inches apart

Allow 2 inches of space between a hose and established plants.

3. To water shrubs or trees, use only one soaker hose.

4. When opening your spigot, give it a quarter-turn. Then, check the hose for whether water is seeping properly. Again, water should be oozing, not spurting. If the water pressure is too low, open the spigot more by degrees.

5. Here's a tip for gauging how long to water. Turn on your spigot, letting the water flow for 45 minutes. Then, dig a hole through your mulch, 4 inches down. That's how far the water should seep, as measured by a yardstick.

Adjust your flow time to reach that depth.

Once you've determined the water delivery rate, you can set a timer.

6. Work carefully around your hoses. Avoid stepping on them or striking them with a hoe. Doing so will split the material, creating leaks.

Winter Storage

It is not recommended to leave your system intact during winter! Water freezing in the lines can cause damage to your set up, especially fittings.

Even if you live in a mild climate, don't let your equipment overwinter outside. Continual outdoor exposure will degrade the materials.

So, when your growing season ends, detach all hoses. If any sections have standing water, empty them. Also, disconnect all the attachments, including a backflow preventer, pressure regulator, and timer.

Then, store your entire system in your garage or basement. By this, you'll protect it from ongoing deterioration.

Cheap, Easy, and Efficient

If your garden is level or on a slight grade, consider watering it with soaker hoses. If you swap them for an overhead system, you'll likely save time, water, and money. Meanwhile, you'll discourage fungus from overtaking your plants.

Since soaker hoses dispense water slowly, your seeds and soil remain intact. Plus, with a Y valve or four-way adapter on your spigot, you can water additional zones. While you must engage one hose at a time, it beats overhead watering hands down.

Streamline watering with a soaker hose system. Your plants will love you for it!