FREE GUIDE · OCT 2026

Watering Without Guessing

A visual, pot-side guide for everyday container plants.

Read the soil and the situation - not just the calendar. A clear way to decide when to check, wait, water, or get more information.





01 LOOK

02 INTERPRET

03 ACT SAFELY

ABOUT ONE MINUTE

Check the pot.
Not the calendar.

Different pots dry at different rates. Inspect what you can safely observe, and use what you know about that plant before deciding to water.



Illustrative scene; appearance alone cannot measure moisture.



Check outer pots and saucers for retained water.

1

Start with safety.

Stay on stable ground. Never lean over a balcony railing or lift or tilt a heavy pot to check drainage. If it is out of safe reach, stop and ask for help.

2

Observe where roots need moisture.

If reachable, gently feel the mix at a suitable point below the surface, following the needs of that plant and pot. A dry top alone does not settle the decision.

3

Decide from evidence.

Still moist? Usually wait on extra watering. Dry where that plant needs to be checked? Consider gentle watering. Unclear, inaccessible, or drainage unknown? Investigate instead of guessing.

Important: This is for ordinary, safely accessible ornamental plants in pots with functioning drainage. Orchids, succulents, reservoirs, seedlings and specialist plants may need different checks; seek species-specific guidance.

Four things that can mislead you.

A symptom or a single photograph is not a moisture measurement. Compare these situations with what you can actually observe.



A dry-looking surface

The top layer can dry while deeper mix is still moist.

CHECK BELOW THE SURFACE, SAFELY.



Rain yesterday

An overhang may shelter a pot. Light rain may not wet the root zone.

CHECK THE ACTUAL POT.



Water runs out fast

Quick runoff can bypass a dry mix or follow a channel. It is not proof that the centre is moist.

PAUSE AND INVESTIGATE THE PATH.



Water in the outer pot

Water held around roots can be a problem, not reassurance. Do not leave a conventional planted pot standing in retained water.

CHECK RETAINED WATER SAFELY.

The illustrations are AI-generated contextual scenes, not diagnostic photographs or demonstrations of a measured dry/wet threshold. Follow a safe physical check and plant-specific guidance.

What should I do next?

Think in decisions, not watering days. This is a bounded guide - not an automatic diagnosis or a promise that one rule fits every plant.

FIRST: Can you check this pot safely?

If **NO**, do not lean, lift or improvise. Record **NOT OBSERVED** and ask someone who can safely assess it. If **YES**, continue.

↓

NEXT: Do you know how this plant should be checked?

If **NO**, identify it or consult plant-specific guidance before deciding how dry the mix should become. If **YES**, check a suitable reachable point.

↓

WHAT DID YOU FIND?

MOIST

WAIT

on extra watering. If the leaves droop or look wrong, investigate other causes; do not use appearance alone as a watering trigger.

UNCLEAR

PAUSE & CHECK.

Conflicting observations, blocked drainage or unsafe access need another safe observation or trusted plant advice.

DRY

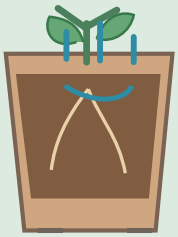
CONSIDER WATER

only if this fits the plant's needs. Apply gently to the mix and observe what happens rather than pouring an arbitrary amount.

While watering: Aim at the potting mix, pour slowly and allow absorption. If water races round the rim or pools, stop assuming the root zone was watered; investigate the water path. Empty safely accessible saucers/outer vessels according to the container setup. Avoid overflow to neighbours below.

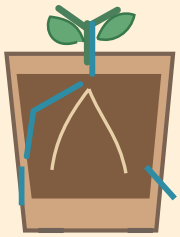
Watch where the water goes.

A drip from the bottom is one clue. It cannot tell you everything about moisture at the centre of a pot.



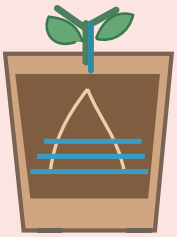
Soaking in

Water gradually enters the growing mix. Check whether the relevant root-zone area needs more; do not assume from a drip alone.



Fast edge flow

Water escapes beside the mix or too quickly. A dry centre may remain; pause, observe, and get pot-specific guidance.



Trapped water

Water lingers in a closed outer vessel. Avoid leaving an ordinary draining pot soaking in standing water.

What to do when the path looks wrong

Fast escape: stop, inspect for gaps or a very dry/hardened mix where reachable, and seek plant-appropriate advice. Do not keep adding unlimited water. **Pooling:** find out whether the pot drains; remove retained water only when it can be done safely. **Can't see:** do not guess - note the observation as unavailable.

How to read these diagrams: They are original simplified drawings of possible water paths, not a measurement of your plant's moisture or a claim about the exact state of its roots.

Practical checks align with published container-care guidance from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). Species, potting mix and local conditions can change the appropriate action.

Try the decision with a real pot.



“It rained all night.”

Your planter is under an overhang. Rain on the balcony floor does not prove the potting mix got wet. Observe the reachable mix before deciding.

NEXT: CHECK THE ACTUAL POT



“The plant looks limp.”

The mix still feels moist at an appropriate safe check point. Extra water may not help. Look for heat, plant stress, drainage or other causes; seek advice if it worsens.

NEXT: WAIT ON WATER; INVESTIGATE



“Water rushed through.”

Quick drainage does not prove the core is evenly moist. Pause, note what happened, and follow pot- and plant-appropriate advice. Watch where runoff goes.

NEXT: INVESTIGATE THE WATER PATH

Further reading (free): RHS, “How to water containers” · rhs.org.uk/container-gardening/how-to-water-containers and RHS “Container maintenance” · rhs.org.uk/container-gardening/maintenance. These independent free sources provide further plant-care detail beyond this pocket guide.

KEEP BY THE WATERING CAN

CHECK · WAIT · WATER

One pot at a time. No universal calendar.

1 · SAFETY Can I check from stable ground without reaching across a railing or lifting anything heavy? If not, **stop and get help.**

2 · PLANT Do I know this plant's watering needs? If not, **identify the plant and find reliable guidance** before inferring a water need.

3 · MIX What do I actually feel at a safe, plant-appropriate point? Don't decide from a dry-looking surface, rain, wilting or a calendar alone.

WAIT

Mix is still moist where it matters. If the plant looks unwell, investigate beyond watering.

CHECK

Unknown plant, mixed signs, water pooling, inaccessible pot or uncertain drainage.

WATER

Relevant point is dry **and** watering fits this plant. Water the mix gently; observe drainage.

Always pause for these safety signals

An unsafe reach · a heavy pot that cannot be moved safely · a blocked or unknown drain · a closed outer pot full of water · water running toward another balcony · an unidentified plant with specialised requirements.

FREE · Keep this page, share it with a gardening friend, or print another copy.
Illustrations teach possible situations. Your real observations decide.

PULL-OUT / PRINTABLE OBSERVATION LOG

14 checks.
Not 14 days to water.

Build a clearer picture of your own plants. Record each **observation**; a check is not a command to water. More than one check can happen in a day.

Pot or plant: _____ **Location/shelter:** _____

Plant-specific moisture preference / reliable source: _____

NO.	DATE	SAFE CHECK POINT	ACTUAL OBSERVATION	NEXT STEP
01				
02				
03				
04				
05				
06				
07				
08				
09				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

Example: “Pot A, sheltered balcony, mix moist at an appropriate safe point - WAIT, recheck when conditions change.” If you cannot reach it safely, write “NOT OBSERVED,” not “DRY.”

This is a practical aid, not a species-specific watering formula or diagnosis. Download or print freely. Published by Steadleaf Press, October 2026. Original explanatory illustrations and AI-generated illustrative scenes, used for context only; no photographs of controlled plant experiments are claimed.