



HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

How to Garden When You Have Too Much Water

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Unusual weather this summer has hurt many gardens in the United States. For many, the problem is not enough rain, for others it is too much.

In some gardens, water sits on the surface of the ground or the ground stays wet for hours after rain stops. The best action then is to move the garden to a place where the water will **drain** better.

Oh, do you want to keep your garden where it is? Then you should plant yellow flag iris, sweet flag, marsh mallow, marsh marigold and other plants that like soft, wet soils.

Do you still want to grow tomatoes, roses and marigolds in that sunny place? It can be done. But you have to get some air into the soil — that is, provide for water drainage — so the roots of these plants can breathe. We will look at three ways you can correct the problem of too much water – you can use one, or all three, in the same garden.

Use a waterway to drain water

One way is to drain the water away to some lower location. The simplest way is with a **ditch**, or, if your garden is large, a few ditches. You will also, of course, need the ditch to drain onto lower ground.

The more **clay** in the soil, the more ditches are needed to drain off the water.

A drainage ditch does not have to be large, just 8 to 10 centimeters. The deeper the ditch, the greater the depth of well-**aerated** soil that results, so dig at least 15 centimeters deep. A gradual **decline** along the length of any ditch, about 15 centimeters per 30.5 meters, keeps water flowing downhill.

Ditches crossing your garden need not be unpleasant to look at or troublesome. Picture a garden in which flat stones line ditches and form bridges across ditches that cross paths. The whole system can be a beautiful water "feature."

These waterways may look like a **classic** Persian garden. The Persian garden, however, uses the long, narrow waterways to bring water to the plants, not take it away.

Use pipes

Another way to drain away water -- without changing the appearance of your garden -- is to bury pipes with small holes underground.

Dig a ditch, as described above, then lay in black pipe that is about 10 centimeters across its width. Available at home and building stores, the pipe is made to bend easily, and the holes in it let in water. Cover the pipe with a **fabric** that water can pass through to keep out dirt and a layer of small stones, then replace the soil.

Place the pipe so water in it will flow to a lower area. Make sure the lower end of the pipe is either open or lays on a group of small stones.

Raise the roots

A third way to give your plants more air is to raise them above the water. Trees and **shrubs** can be planted on raised piles of soil, often called "beds." The beds need to be wide enough to allow roots to spread. How wide depends on the eventual size of the plant. If you want a bigger plant, give its roots more room to grow.

For vegetables and flowers, raised beds provide well-aerated soil. To make a raised bed, build a box at least 15 centimeters high of wood or stone. You should be able to reach into the middle of the box without standing in it. Remove grass from the inside area and add a layer of flattened boxes or old newspapers to prevent unwanted growth. To avoid unwanted plants, fill it with the kind of mix you would use for growing in a container. The higher the surface of the bed, the greater the depth of well-drained soil for the roots.

A grouping of raised beds, as well as the materials used for their sides and the paths, might make you think of **medieval** Europe. It will look even more like a classic European garden if the edging is of wood with small, rounded cream-colored stones for the paths.

Or form the beds with rough cut **logs** and lay crushed rocks on the paths, and you might instead imagine yourself riding up on a horse to enter this colonial American garden.

You could be like the Aztec gardeners near a lake outside of Mexico City. They took the wet soil from between their planting beds to keep them raised. Plant plenty of marigolds, a favorite flower of the Aztecs, to create a similar garden.

I'm Jill Robbins.

Lee Reich reported on this story for the Associated Press. Jill Robbins adapted it for Learning English. Susan Shand was the editor.

Words in This Story

drain – *v.* to flow into, away from, or out of something

ditch – *n.* a long narrow hole that is dug along a road, field, etc., and used to hold or move water

clay – *n.* a heavy, sticky material from the earth that is made into different shapes and that becomes hard when it is baked or dried

aerate – *v.* to put air a gas into (something, such as soil or a liquid); or to provide a way for air to enter naturally

decline – *n.* to become lower in amount or less in number

classic – *adj.* used to describe something that has been popular for a long time

fabric – *n.* woven or knitted material; in this case special cloth made to use in a garden

shrub – *n.* a plant that has stems of wood and is smaller than a tree

medieval – *adj.* of or relating to the Middle Ages : of or relating to the period of European history from about C.E. 500 to about 1500

log – *n.* a long, heavy section of a tree that has fallen or been cut down

Do you have a garden? How is it doing these days? We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments Section.
