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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## IRRIGATING THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

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During the hot summer months, keeping an adequate moisture level in the vegetable garden can be a challenge. This is the harvest season, when squash, tomatoes, beans, cucumbers and other above ground produce is growing rapidly. All of these crops require consistent hydration to form the juicy, water laden produce we love to eat. It is important to never allow the roots of plants to dry out, but overwatering can be a hazard, as well. Here are a few tips to make the job easier.

1. Avoid overhead watering from a sprinkler. Moisture on the leaves during hot weather can encourage mildews and other fungal conditions to occur. In addition, much of the water evaporates before it even hits the plant, and little ends up in the soil where it is needed.
2. Several inches of mulch, such as straw or untreated grass clippings, can preserve moisture in the soil, and keep the soil at a more constant temperature.
3. A drip system delivering irrigation right to the base of the plants is ideal; the moisture goes exactly where it is needed, and the amount can be controlled either manually or with the use of a garden timer that turns the water on and off automatically.
4. Soaker hoses placed along rows of plants, preferably under a thick layer of mulch, can provide an economical, simple and reliable irrigation system. Check the hoses frequently to see if leaks have developed or if areas are plugged and not providing hydration.
5. Time your watering sessions to determine how long to keep the flow going. Use a moisture probe or dig down a bit to see if the water is getting deep enough into the soil to access all the root areas, then adjust the watering time accordingly.
6. Don't neglect the root crops. Carrots, beets, onions and other vegetables have deep roots. It is important to provide enough hydration to moisten the entire root area, so the plants will produce abundantly.

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*Ann Warwick has been a University of Idaho Master Gardener in Bonner County since 1996.*

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