

# 5 CHEAP AND EFFECTIVE WAYS TO SAVE WATER ON YOUR FARM

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Keeping crops alive during the dry season is hard work. It is a constant battle when water is scarce and the sun is hot.

However, for those of you who are business-minded you will know about the huge benefits that can be reaped if you can grow, harvest and sell in these seasons. As standard, rain-fed crops leave the market, the price of irrigated crops soars.

Therefore, it is worthwhile investing in that dry season crop. And yes, you can invest in drought resistant seeds, complicated irrigation canals and drip irrigation. But did you know, there are some really simple, effective and cheap ways to use your irrigation water more efficiently?

## 1. Mulch



We cannot overemphasise the importance of mulching. Mulch is something laid on the surface of the soil to protect the soil from the air, water and the sun.

To mulch, first weed the soil then spread a thick layer of organic mulch on the soil. Examples of organic mulches are:

- Chopped leaves
- Straw
- Grass clippings
- Wood chips
- Shredded bark
- Pine needles

Mulching helps save time and labour as it discourages weeds and pests and conserve water through reduced evaporation.

Organic mulch also goes a long way to improving the soil health. And guess what...? Healthy soils also retain more water.

## 2. Irrigate early morning or dusk



At the hottest and driest time of the year it is most efficient to water your crops in the morning or in the evening. This avoids water loss from evapotranspiration (water evaporating from the land and leaves of plants). Evaporation happens most in the midday sun.

If you have a solar powered irrigation pump, this works most effectively in the midday sun - but you can use this to your advantage, pump water to an over-head tank during the day and use gravity flow to irrigate at the most optimum times.

### 3. Avoid hit and miss watering



Hit or miss watering is where you are not careful with the application of water to your crops. This can be especially damaging to crops like tomatoes. Make sure water is going to the roots of the plant, not the leaves. But also be aware that different plants have different water needs - learn about the specific watering needs of each of your plants and act accordingly.

### 4. Don't over-water



It's a common misconception that plants would be happy with lots of water all of the time. But often farmers are over-watering crops unnecessarily. Save water! Plants will only take what they need and then all that extra water goes to waste through evaporation, run-off or infiltration.

In the simplest terms - if your soil feels dry below the surface (test by sticking your finger in), then it needs more moisture. You can also get some handy tech to help you with this, rain gauges help you to measure how much rain you've had and simple soil moisture sensors can let you know when the ground lacks moisture.

Be strict with yourself - don't over-water!

### 5. Check for leaks and damage



If you've already invested in an irrigation system, make sure you're not losing any water before it reaches the crops. Irrigation pipes and equipment can become damaged or blocked which causes leaks. Thoroughly check your equipment for leaks and repair them so that all the water you have gets to the crops.