



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Cooperative Extension

Master Gardener

Sonoran Desert Winter Watering Guidelines

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You may not realize it, but all plants and especially desert adapted plants* need much less water during the winter months of December – March. Due to much cooler temperatures, there is less water evaporation from the soil as well as less transpiration of water vapor by the plants themselves. Continuing summer watering into the winter season can cause plants to produce tender new shoots that are easily killed by the first frost. Cacti and succulents which are watered through winter can have cells freeze and burst due to the water stored therein.

So you're thinking; how DO I decrease water in winter? You or your gardener resets your irrigation controller (a small plastic box usually located near your outside electric breaker panel) to decrease the frequency and duration of watering. The recommended AMUWA (Arizona Municipal Water Users Association) guidelines for winter watering are as follows:

Trees:

Desert adapted: water every 30 – 60 days to a depth of 24"-36"

High water use: water every 14 – 30 days to a depth of 24"-36"

Shrubs:

Desert adapted: water every 30 – 45 days to a depth of 18 – 24"

High water use: water every 10 – 14 days to a depth of 18 – 24"

Ground covers and Vines:

Desert adapted: water every 21 – 45 days to a depth of 8 – 12"

High water use: water every 10 – 14 days to a depth of 8 – 12"

Cacti and succulents:

Normally don't need winter watering, but if water is needed: water to a depth of 8 – 12".

*A desert adapted plant is one that can subsist (but maybe not look its best) on annual rainfall.