

The Essential Garden Hose

by Rita Pelczar

THE GARDEN HOSE IS SUCH a simple tool, you might think there's not a lot to say about selecting, using, and caring for one. However, there are different types and qualities of hoses as well as special fittings that will increase their efficiency and utility. Here's an overview.

CHARACTERISTICS

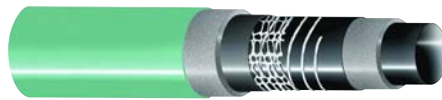
Hoses come in a variety of lengths and diameters. Because added length reduces water pressure, you should buy the shortest hose that meets your distance requirements. Most garden hoses are 25 to 100 feet long, sold in increments of 25 feet, and they range from 1/2-inch to 3/4-inch in diameter. Water is delivered faster through hoses with a larger diameter.



Hoses are generally made of vinyl, rubber, or a combination of the two. Better quality hoses are reinforced with a radial cord and are constructed in layers. The number of plies (layers) varies from one to eight—the greater number of plies, the stronger the hose.

Vinyl hoses are lightweight and relatively inexpensive, but they are less forgiving when crimped, and may become brittle and crack over time. Although rubber hoses usually last longer and are

less likely to burst under pressure than vinyl types, they are more expensive and heavier—an important consideration if you need to lug your hoses around the yard. For most gardening tasks, a good quality rubber-reinforced vinyl hose is a good compromise. Look for one that has heavy-duty fittings that are less likely to leak or crack.



Above: Multiple layers, as seen in this Flexogen hose, add durability. **Left:** To maximize water pressure in the garden, use the shortest hose that satisfies your needs.

The Flexogen hose, offered by Gilmour Manufacturing, boasts eight-ply construction. Foam inner layers contribute flexibility while keeping it lightweight, and outer layers are abrasion and weather resistant. At the faucet end, a rigid collar prevents kinking, and its couplings are made of durable brass.

Teknor Apex offers the NeverKink™ line of hoses that have a patented technology that prevents kinking and makes winding up hoses after use a snap. Several companies, including Teknor Apex and Aquapore Moisture Systems, whose hoses are distributed by Fiskars, manufacture hoses with a significant percentage of recycled rubber and/or plastic. For a list of suppliers for these “green” products, see the Environmental Protection Agency’s Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines website (www.epa.gov/cpg/products/garden.htm) and click on its “Database of Manufacturers and Suppliers.”

HOSES FOR DIFFERENT USES

Hoses are used for more than transporting water from the faucet to the garden. Soaker and sprinkler hoses are designed to deliver a steady stream of water to a specific area. By focusing the water where it's needed, water is conserved. Although less precise than drip irrigation systems (see the article about drip irrigation on page 32), these hoses provide a simple, inexpensive, and transportable means of irrigating beds and vegetable gardens.

Soaker or sprinkler rings work on the same principle. They are designed to be placed around newly planted trees or shrubs to provide the slow, deep watering that helps young plants become established. The Trickle Ring Tree Saver supplies up to half gallon of water per minute through the holes in the rigid, circular plastic tube, and is recommended for the critical first year of newly planted trees. Similarly, the Fiskars Tree and Shrub Soaker Ring fits around the trunk of trees or shrubs to slowly soak the root zone.



The Trickle Ring Tree Saver delivers water to the root zone of newly planted shrubs and trees.

Sources

Choice Products, Inc., Paducah, KY. (270) 554-8500.

Fiskars Brand, Inc., Garden Tools & Accessories, Sauk City, WI. (800) 500-4849. www.fiskars.com.

Gilmour Manufacturing, Somerset, PA. (800) 458-0107. www.gilmour.com.

Teknor Apex Company, Pawtucket, RI. (800) 289-6786. www.teknorapex.com.

The Trickle Ring Company, Arrington, TN. (615) 414-5309. www.tricklerring.com.

Gardeners often reach for a convenient hose for a drink of water, but many hoses are unsafe for this use. According to a May 2003 article in *Consumer Reports*, only hoses that are labeled for drinking—or that are thoroughly flushed out before use—are safe. Many hoses contain polyvinyl chloride with lead as a stabilizer. Unsafe levels of lead may leach into water left standing in the hose. Algae and bacteria can build up inside the hose. For more information about drinking from hoses, see the online article “Dare You Drink from a Garden Hose?” (www.consumerreports.org/cro/health-fitness/get-the-lead-out-of-the-garden-hose-503/overview/index.htm).

MAKING CONNECTIONS

If you use soaker or sprinkler hoses, it is often convenient to leave them attached to a faucet. But if you want to use the faucet for other purposes from time to time, you can make life easier by attaching a water distributor with two to four taps. Connected directly to the faucet, it allows you to run multiple hoses from a single source. A separate shut-off valve is provided for each tap.

Another tool that expands your hose options is the Dual-Flo™ Nozzle from Choice Products, Inc. Made of die-cast aluminum, this hand-held nozzle has an internal valve system with two outlets, allowing the user to select either a high pressure stream, or normal flow without switching hoses. Each outlet can be opened or closed independently. A hand trigger controls the strength of the flow from the pressurized outlet.

Faucets are not always located in the most convenient places. Rather than trampling beds or battling shrubs each

time you want to access your faucet, consider attaching a spigot extender. A short hose runs from the faucet to a spigot that is anchored in the ground in a more convenient location. The spigots may be elevated for further ease of access. And if



The Dual-Flo splitter nozzle from Choice Products allows you to switch easily between normal water flow and high pressure.

you need to thread your hose through beds or around corners, hose guides inserted at critical points help prevent kinking and damage to small plants.

HOSE MAINTENANCE

To extend the life of your hose, store it out of the sun, since ultraviolet rays can weaken or degrade it. If your hose is not equipped with a protective collar at the faucet end, purchase a hose saver—a short length of hose surrounded by a coil of bend-resistant wire—to provide extra support to this stress point. Drain your hose before freezing weather arrives to prevent cracking and store it in a protected place, preferably in your “green garage.”

Rita Pelczar is contributing editor for The American Gardener.

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② OUTDOOR PLANTS	To START NEW ROOT AND FOLIAGE ACTION, SHOOTING DOWN, UP and filling-in, sideways
③ BARE ROOTS	And TO GET MORE FLOWERS, LONGER and MORE BEAUTIFUL
④ FLOWERING	And TO GET MORE FLOWERS, LONGER and MORE BEAUTIFUL
⑤ SEEDLINGS	TO PLANT THEM ALL SAFELY, UNIFORMLY – and GROWING MORE STRONGLY
⑥ TREES	TO GET “TWO YEARS’ GROWTH IN ONE”?
⑦ FRUITING	For EARLIER, HEAVIER, BEARING?
⑧ BULBS	TO START THEM VIGOROUSLY, Beating Soil-rot, Hastening Better BLOOMING
⑨ SEEDS	To Help GERMINATION Percentage and SPEED EARLIER, BETTER YIELDS, including Vegetables
⑩ LAWN	To Make QUICKER, deeper, TOUGHER TURF from SEED, SOD, Stolons, Sprigs, HYDRO-seeding

11 XMAS TREES	17 HYDROSEEDING	22 FLOWERING PLANT
12 REFORESTATION	18 LANDSCAPING	COMPETITIONS
13 HYDROPONICS	19 PROPAGATION	23 INTERIORS CAPING
14 FIELD CROPS	20 ANTI-EROSION	24 CUT FLOWERS
15 BONSAI	21 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT	25 WEATHER DAMAGE
16 TISSUE CULTURE		26 WATER GARDENS

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