



Irrigation Tips

By Steve Carper

Every year at this time, thousands of people across the country turn on their automatic irrigation systems, make their best guess as to how long to operate their system and then hope for the best. Too often this method results in frustration at the appearance of the landscape and the size of the water bill. Sound familiar? Automatically controlled irrigation systems can be a tool to optimize water-use efficiency, but in most circumstances they waste large amounts of water due to improper scheduling or maintenance practices.

Here are some tips that can help you maximize your system's water efficiency:

- **Hire an irrigation professional to test and adjust your system annually.**

Irrigation contractors have the experience and tools to properly activate your system in the spring and shut it down in the fall. They can quickly inspect and diagnose your system for necessary maintenance, adjustments and repairs.

- **Inspect your system while it is running a few times during the watering season.**

Look for and repair leaking or broken sprinklers. Clean out clogged nozzles, replace missing nozzles and reposition those that spray unintended areas. Lawnmowers, maturing plant material, shifting soils and curious children can break, block or reposition nozzles so that they do not operate as designed.

- **Install a rain shut-off device or soil moisture sensors to prevent watering during wet weather.**

Irrigate according to weather patterns. Sensors can detect effective rainfall and soil moisture conditions and prevent watering when necessary.

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- **Adjust your watering schedule according to weather conditions at least once or twice a month.**

Landscape watering requirements vary throughout the irrigation season. During spring and fall months your landscape requires less water than during peak summer months like July, August and early September. Many irrigation controllers have a water budget or percent adjustment feature that will recalculate and recalibrate the entire schedule to increase or decrease watering in one step.

- **Participate in an irrigation audit program. Receive a report on your system's condition, performance and scheduling recommendations.**

A Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor is certified by the Irrigation Association to perform landscape irrigation audits. Written audit reports include; tune-up recommendations to maximize performance, analysis of irrigation efficiency with regard to historic water use and seasonal scheduling recommendations.

About the author

Steve Carper is the Conservation Technician for the Tualatin Valley Water District. His focus is developing TVWD's new B.I.G. conservation program for business, industry, government and multi-family housing facilities within the district. Steve was born in Bend, Ore., and recently returned to Beaverton from Eugene. Steve graduated from the University of Oregon earning degrees in Geography and Environmental Studies and minoring in Landscape Architecture. His professional background includes 15 years in the Willamette Valley landscape industry with experience in construction, irrigation and maintenance.

