

Water Efficient Landscape By Texas Agrilife Extension and Research

Efficient irrigation practices keep a landscape healthy and beautiful. Irrigation problems damage your landscape by creating too dry and/or too wet areas, resulting in water loss and high cost. An irrigation check-up identifies problems with the system and sprinklers, and helps you estimate how long to run each station or zone. In many communities during the summer, 30–50 percent of the total water used is for landscape irrigation. To save water resources and money, apply water to a landscape as efficiently as possible. Check the irrigation system at least twice a season for problems.

Step 1. If you have the original irrigation system design, make a copy so you can make notes on it. If you do not have the original design, sketch the irrigation layout and number of sprinkler heads in each station. Number the heads on the sketch so you can make notes about each one.

Step 2. Run each station and observe each sprinkler head to see if it is running and distributing water properly, noting which ones are working correctly and which ones require attention.

Look for these problems:

Sprinkler heads spraying water onto the sidewalk, driveway, or road

Sprinkler heads missing, not operating, or having reduced water flow or poor distribution patterns

Sprinkler heads broken, gushing water out of the top, or not popping up

Sprinkler heads no longer straight up and down

Sprinkler heads that cause a cloud of mist

Grass, shrubbery, or trees blocking the distribution pattern

Dry landscape areas

Possible causes: low system water pressure, a plugged nozzle, or wind

Irrigation heads installed too far apart or not in a recommended square or triangle pattern

Step 3. Repair all problems yourself or hire a licensed irrigator. Most repairs require cleaning out a sprinkler head. After completing all repairs, run the system and time how long each station should run.

Step 4. Check for uniform distribution. Collect several empty, straight-sided cans such as cat food or tuna fish cans. Use a minimum of three cans per sprinkler head. Five cans per station are even better. Mark the inside of each can like a rain gauge with markings for $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, and 1 inch.

Step 5. Place the cans throughout one irrigation station.

Step 6. Run the first station for 15 minutes.

Step 7. Write down how much water is in each can. The ideal irrigation system distributes water uniformly in the area, and each can should have the same amount of water.

Step 8. Repeat these procedures for each station.

Step 9. Estimate the amount of water your landscape requires: Variables include the amount of sunlight, type of plants, type of soil, time of year, and amount of precipitation.

Turf areas in full sun on clay soil during the summer require about 1 inch of water every 5 –7 days.

Turf areas in full sun on sandy soil during the summer require about 1.5 inches of water every 5 –7 days.

Turf areas in full sun on clay soil during the winter require about 1 inch of water every 15–20 days.

Turf areas in full sun on sandy soil during the winter require about 1.5 inches of water every 15–20 days.

Shrub, groundcover, and perennial areas require about half the amount of water that turf areas require if you keep 2–4 inches of mulch covering the root area.

Water plant containers and vegetable gardens as required.

Step 10. Do the math. You now know how many inches of water each station applies in 15 minutes. Set your controller according to how much time is necessary for each station to provide the estimated amount of water for the plants in that station. If you do not have an instruction manual for your controller, order one from the manufacturer either by telephone or on the Internet.

Step 11. Change the irrigation schedule each season.

(Most controllers have an A and B schedule):

Spring: Use 20 percent less than the average summer schedule or as needed because the North Texas area usually receives a lot of rain in the spring.

Fall: Use 30 percent less than the average summer schedule or only as needed.

Winter: Turn off the controller and water only if there is no precipitation in a month.

Local, licensed irrigators and some Cities have teamed up to offer residents discounted rates for irrigation checkups. (Contact your City for more details) Call a licensed irrigator today to schedule an irrigation checkup and watch your water bill decrease!

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