

July is Smart Irrigation Month

Did you know that over 50 percent of water that is used to irrigate lawns and gardens is wasted? The amount of water wasted by the average homeowner in one year would be enough to fill up three swimming pools! Most homeowners tend to overwater due to inefficient habits. So, in an attempt to raise awareness of advances in irrigation efficiency, the Irrigation Association identified July as Smart Irrigation Month.

By properly irrigating, you can save money on your bill, have a healthier lawn and landscape and conserve water. To water efficiently, it is necessary to apply just enough water and only when needed. With just a few adjustments and simple practices along with new technology, the irrigation system you are using can be made more efficient.

The Irrigation Association offers these water-saving tips to maintain and update automatic irrigation systems:

- 1) **Adapt your watering schedule to the weather and the season.** Familiarize yourself with the settings on your irrigation controller. Adjust the watering schedule regularly to conform with current weather conditions.
- 2) **Schedule each individual zone in your irrigation system.** "Scheduling" accounts for the type of sprinkler, sun or shade exposure and the soil type for the specific area. The same watering schedule should almost never apply to all zones in the system.
- 3) **Inspect your system monthly.** Check for leaks, broken or clogged heads, and other problems, or engage an irrigation professional to regularly check your system. Clean micro-irrigation filters as needed.
- 4) **Adjust sprinkler heads.** Correct obstructions that prevent sprinklers from distributing water evenly. Keep water off pavement and structures.
- 5) **Get a professional system audit.** Hire a professional to conduct an irrigation audit and uniformity test to make sure areas are being watered evenly. This can be especially helpful if you have areas being under-watered or brown spots. The Irrigation Association maintains an online list of IA Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditors.
- 6) **Consider "smart" technology.** Climate- or soil moisture sensor-based controllers evaluate weather or soil moisture conditions and then calculate and automatically adjust the irrigation schedule to meet the specific needs of your landscape. Learn more at <http://www.irrigation.org/smartwater/>
- 7) **Install a rain shutoff-switch - inexpensive and effective.** Required by law in Florida, these money-saving sensors turn off your system in rainy weather and help to compensate for natural rainfall. The device can be retrofitted to almost any system.
- 8) **Consider low volume drip irrigation for plant beds.** Install micro irrigation for gardens, trees and shrubs. Micro irrigation includes drip (also known as trickle), micro spray jets, micro-sprinklers, or bubbler irrigation to irrigate slowly and minimize evaporation, runoff and overspray.

9) **Water at the optimum time.** Water when the sun is low or down, winds are calm and temperatures are cool - between the evening and early morning - to reduce evaporation. You can lose as much as 30% of water to evaporation by watering mid-day.

10) **Water only when needed.** Saturate root zones and let the soil dry. Watering too much and too frequently results in shallow roots, weed growth, disease and fungus.

Best advice for a healthy, drought- and stress-tolerant lawn and landscape: use less water. These tips will help keep more money in your wallet instead of sending it down the drain.

We all know what a precious resource our water is. Remember it is a non-renewable resource. We have what we have and we need to conserve it and keep it clean. By going through the steps above, you can be a part of the solution to water conservation. After all, the latest farm irrigation survey shows growers are using more modern irrigation practices and producing more crops on less land with less water. If the producers can grow more food by using these techniques, think how great your lawn will look with efficient irrigation.