



FACT SHEET

How Your Sprinkler System Can Save Water and Money

During a drought, many Colorado communities enact mandatory or voluntary outdoor watering restrictions that limit watering to specific days during the week. Don't feel compelled to water just because it's your designated watering day. Over watering is wasteful and can actually harm plants.

Following these simple guidelines from plant and landscape experts can help you apply the right amount of water to your yard, at the right time, to keep your landscape healthy. While it's important to follow restrictions if they apply, these tips can help you use water wisely every year, wet or dry.

Tip #1: Perform proper system maintenance

When you first turn on your system and throughout the watering season, check for leaks and broken sprinkler heads and nozzles, and repair promptly. Ensure heads are at ground level, not too high or low, straight and not leaning or being blocked by tall grasses or plants, which can deflect and waste water.

Spray heads that mist or fog indicate the water pressure is too high and the system is wasting water. Installing pressure-regulating devices will save water and help apply water directly to the plants.

Replacing mismatched nozzles and installing higher-efficiency nozzles is an inexpensive way to save water. Many water providers offer rebates on high-efficiency and rotating nozzles, so check your water provider's website for rebate guidelines.



Tip #2: Program your system the right way

Never set the timer and forget it. Adjust the amount of water you deliver based on the time of year, natural precipitation and plant needs. A shady area will require less water than a hot, sunny area. Spring and fall seasons require less water than the hot summer months. Also, readjust the clock when plants become established, as they require less water then, too. Check your soil before you water by inserting a screwdriver in the soil. If it is easy to push in, do not water (note: with sandy soil you may still need to water even if the screwdriver inserts easily). If the screwdriver is hard to push in, water according to the seasonal requirements following your water provider's guidelines.

The amount of water you apply should not exceed the soil's ability to absorb it. In the summer heat, set your timer to cycle and soak. Professionals recommend a cycle-and-soak watering method to maximize absorption and minimize runoff.

For example, a pop-up spray head requires three short cycles in place of one long cycle with 15-30 minute intervals. An automatic rotating sprinkler head, or oscillating type, will typically require three times more run time to complete its cycle since it is rotating and not stationary. Cluster plants together that have similar water needs so you can water accordingly.

Tip #3: Consider 'smart' technology that does the thinking for you

Smart controllers including evapotranspiration (ET) technology can help save water by using weather data to help determine when to water. ET helps take human error out of the equation and determines the amount of water that needs to be applied based on scientific information, making it more precise for those operating the system.

Rain sensors, another technology, help avoid watering the yard during and after a rainstorm. Many water providers offer rebates on smart controllers and shut-off devices so check their websites for guidelines.



Tip #4: Update your system or design a smart one from the start

Design the irrigation system so it distributes water uniformly across your yard. Design irrigation systems based on a direct knowledge and comprehensive understanding of site conditions including:

- soil type and infiltration rate
- plant type, treatment and placement
- climate
- grading
- slopes
- exposure to wind and sun
- water availability
- size of irrigated area
- construction budget

Consider installing drip irrigation or underground watering systems to limit evaporation and to apply water to plants' roots more efficiently. Drip irrigation is recommended for watering trees, shrubs and veggie and flower gardens. Design the system to include separate watering zones for trees, flowerbeds, gardens and lawns. You do not want to have your lawn and flowerbeds watered together, since their water requirements differ. If you are watering two different plant materials together, one is likely to be over-watered while the other is under-watered. Watering separately helps save water and improves the health of the plant.

Tip #5: Check for watering restrictions/guidelines

During a drought, water providers may have mandatory or voluntary watering restrictions. Check in with your local provider to find out what restrictions apply to you.

Landscape experts recommend against watering during the heat of the day. Avoid watering from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and while it is rainy or windy. Adjust your timer to follow these guidelines. If your timer technology is old, you may want to update it to manage water more efficiently.

Tip #7: If you don't know, hire a pro

If you don't have the time or expertise to maintain and program your system, or install and learn new technologies, hire a professional irrigation specialist. When interviewing contractors, ask for water-saving data from similar-sized properties to determine the best contractor and approach. Hire a contractor with expertise in irrigation installation and maintenance, and ask if he or she is Landscape Industry Certified. This certification is a rigorous testing program that indicates the landscape technician is proficient in the latest technologies.

Tip #6: Get an irrigation evaluation

Irrigation professionals can conduct an evaluation to help you determine a sprinkler system's efficiency and identify how to correct problems. Many water providers also offer irrigation audits, and in some cases, at no cost. Check your water provider's website for guidelines and availability.



For more information:

Green Industries of Colorado – www.greenco.org
Industry Best Management Practices and conservation resources

Plant Select – www.plantselect.org
Water-wise plants suitable for the Rocky Mountain region

CWCB Drought Response Portal – www.coh2o.co
Drought conditions and state-wide watering restrictions

This fact sheet is part of the Green Industries of Colorado (GreenCO) education series. GreenCO is an alliance of seven trade associations representing all facets of horticulture and landscape industries. This educational material is courtesy of GreenCO and made possible through a Water Efficiency Program Grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB).