



Recommended Runtimes & Tips for Automatic Irrigation Systems

Landscapes are often overwatered. By considering the type of plant material, type of head, and sun exposure, homeowners can keep their landscapes green and save water.

The following water tips and irrigation schedules should help you lower your irrigation use.

- **Adjust runtimes by 10%:** All irrigation runtimes should start at the lowest minutes when turning the system on for the season and be adjusted upward or downward 2 minutes as it gets hotter or cooler. Only areas that start to show stress should be increased. Shady areas should be watered much less than sunny areas.
- **Use multiple start times:** Our clay, shallow soils cannot absorb water very fast. Runtimes over 15 minutes for sprays and 20 minutes for rotors should be divided into two cycles. For example, a 10-minute runtime scheduled to start at 1am and the second start time at 3am will result in 20 minutes of watering. Most controllers have capability of 3 or more start times per program.
- **Decrease times in less visible areas:** This is a “rob Peter to pay Paul” type of strategy. If you have areas that really need to be watered heavily during the summer for visual appeal, then you can decrease the run times in some of the less visible zones (such as sides of houses) and increase the time in a zone that really needs it.
- **Stay on a once per week schedule as long as possible:** You can always increase the run time on a station that needs a little help through the summer. Increasing the run times on individual stations that need the extra water will not drastically increase your water consumption. However, increasing the frequency of watering will increase the water consumption of **ALL** the stations on the system whether they needed the increase or not.
- **Water less frequently, but deeper:** With frequent irrigation, grass roots do not grow to their maximum depth because they are receiving very regular watering at the surface of the soil. Instead, thoroughly saturate the soil profile with deep, infrequent waterings. When this occurs, the roots try to grow to their maximum depth to reach as much of the available water as possible. This will result in a more drought tolerant grass.
- **Install a rain shut-off device on your irrigation system.** This device can save you money by not watering during or after a rain shower. Set to ½” it will only shut the system off when there is a significant rain event.
- **Turn OFF your irrigation system after a rain.** The rain shut-off device will turn the system off immediately after or during a rainstorm, but it may allow the system to come back on too soon. Our heavy clay soil holds and absorbs a lot of water. Continuing to water when the soil profile is already full will only cause the water to run-off.
- **Your sprinklers shouldn’t mist.** If your irrigation system sprays a fine mist into the air, you are wasting water. Water pressure is too high, and the water droplets are too fine to fall on ground and adequately water the landscape. You may need to have a pressure reduction valve installed on the system to reduce the pressure.
- **What time should I water?** Watering at 9 or 10pm could keep your grass wet all night. Grass that stays wet for 10 hours could develop fungus. Water after midnight and before sunrise, before the wind and sun come up.
- **How do I know when to water?** Make sure your landscape needs water before you turn on your system. Let the soil dry out so that the water can be absorbed but be careful not to stress your grass too much -- that can be just as harmful as overwatering. You’ll know your grass needs water when you walk on it and the footprints remain, the grass leaves fold up, or your Bermuda grass turns dark green. You can also use a soil probe, screwdriver or trowel to check the soil moisture level 3-4 inches below the surface.
- **Make seasonal changes:** Determine the seasonal water needs from the list of common landscape, turf and plants below. Rule of thumb is that spring and fall schedules can be half of your summer schedule (i.e. run once per week in spring and twice per week in summer). Turn the system off during the winter (November thru March, April, or May, depending on the weather). Winter is not the growing season and rain typically supplies all the needed water.



| Spring/Fall = April, May, June, October | | | | | Summer = July, August, September | | | | |
|---|----------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------|--|----------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Schedule for one (1) start time (i.e. 3am). | | | | | Schedule for two (2) start times (i.e. 12am & 3am) | | | | |
| Plant | Exposure | Type of Head | Days | Runtime (min) | Plant | Exposure | Type of Head | Days | Runtime (min) |
| St. Augustine | sun | spray | as needed, max. 1x/wk | 10 to 15 | St. Augustine | sun | spray | Every 5-7 days | 7 to 8 |
| | | rotor | as needed, max. 1x/wk | 15 to 20 | | | rotor | Every 5-7 days | 12 to 15 |
| | shade | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 15 | | shade | spray | Every 5-7 days | 4 to 6 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | Every 5-7 days | 8 to 12 |
| Bermudagrass | sun | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 15 | Bermudagrass | sun | spray | Every 5-7 days | 5 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | Every 5-7 days | 10 |
| | shade | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 10 | | shade | spray | Every 5-7 days | 4 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | Every 5-7 days | 8 to 10 |
| Zoysia | sun | spray | as needed, max. 1x/wk | 10 to 15 | Zoysia | sun | spray | Every 5-7 days | 5 to 8 |
| | | rotor | as needed, max. 1x/wk | 20 | | | rotor | Every 5-7 days | 10 |
| | shade | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 15 | | shade | spray | Every 5-7 days | 5 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | Every 5-7 days | 10 |
| Buffalograss | sun | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 10 to 15 | Buffalograss | sun | spray | 1x per 2 wks | 5 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | 1x per 2 wks | 10 |
| | shade | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 15 | | shade | spray | 1x per 2 wks | 4 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | 1x per 2 wks | 8 to 9 |
| Common shrubs | sun | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 10 to 15 | Common shrubs | sun | spray | 1x per 2 wks | 5 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | 1x per 2 wks | 10 |
| | shade | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 15 | | shade | spray | 1x per 2 wks | 3 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | 1x per 2 wks | 8 |
| Common groundcovers | sun | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 10 to 15 | Common groundcovers | sun | spray | 1x per 2 wks | 5 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | 1x per 2 wks | 10 |
| | shade | spray | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 15 | | shade | spray | 1x per 2 wks | 4 |
| | | rotor | rarely, 1x per 2 wks | 20 | | | rotor | 1x per 2 wks | 8 |