

# a lush lawn less time

If you're tired of spending weekends dragging out the hose and moving sprinklers to keep your lawn lush and green, it may be time to consider an automatic irrigation system. Automatic sprinkler systems save time, and modern "smart" irrigation system controllers can save water and improve the health of your lawn and landscape by watering the right amount, in the right location at the right time.

"The goal of a well-designed irrigation system is to keep your planting beds and lawn lush and healthy with the least amount of water," says Steven Flury, certified irrigation contractor and president of Atlantic Lighting & Irrigation in Gambrills, Md. Maintaining your landscape is one of the most important things you can do for your property. "A well kept landscape can impact your home's value by as much as 14 percent," Flury explains.

Most homeowners over water by 30 to 40 percent, a problem that a good irrigation system can prevent. People often associate a brown lawn with too little water, but overwatering creates an environment right for pests and fungus, causes ugly brown spots and is extremely wasteful.

A well-designed irrigation system includes multiple zones so that different parts of the yard can be watered according to the specific needs of the plants in that location without affecting other areas. "Grass requires more water than groundcovers, bushes, and trees so dividing the system into multiple zones will allow you to control the amount of water you use as well as apply the correct amount of water required for each zone and type of foliage," Flury says. And ultimately, the more zones you plan for, the more tailored the watering schedule can be. ▶

Keeping you lawn neat and green with an automatic irrigation system

by Beth Casteel

## Controlling Sprinklers the Smart Way

Smart irrigation technology that has come on the market in recent years can save time and money. Smart controllers turn the system on and off based on actual weather conditions, either using weather data from the Internet or from on-site weather stations or sensors. Smart controllers also factor in site conditions, like slope and soil type, and information about the plant species to automatically create the best watering schedule. Studies have shown substantial water savings with smart controllers over the standard clock-type irrigation controllers that water according to a schedule no matter how much it rains. The standard controllers must be reset with each season.

Another option for large properties is a centralized irrigation controller. Typically used on golf courses, these systems are moving into residential and commercial applications. With just a few computer keystrokes or by remote control, the user can reprogram controllers in multiple locations.

A rain sensing shutoff device is a low-cost option that can be installed on almost any new or existing system. A rain sensor is inexpensive and will automatically override the system settings to prevent watering when it rains.



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## Low-Volume Irrigation

Drip and micro-irrigation, which are both forms of low-volume irrigation, are good options for many parts of your yard. Drip, as the name suggests, involves slowly dripping water from emitters attached to a tube or irrigation tape that lies on the ground. Drip irrigation is often a good choice for gardens or flower beds. Micro-irrigation, which utilizes small micro sprinklers, works well for slowly delivering the right amount of water to the root zones of trees and bedding plants.



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## tips on maintaining a beautiful healthy lawn

- The landscape and irrigation should work well together to maximize water usage. Try “hydro-zoning” by grouping plants with similar water needs together.
- Install excess irrigation zone capacity. Installing extra connections at the outset makes it easier and less expensive to expand and customize your system later.
- Make sure the installer includes the required backflow prevention device to keep irrigation water from contaminating the main water supply. Your contractor will know which type is specified for your area.
- Irrigation lines should be installed below the freeze line and at a depth where aeration and other lawn maintenance will not interfere with them.
- Set your irrigation schedule to water when the sun is low, the winds are calm and temperatures are cool. The best time to water is in the evening or just before sunrise.
- Water enough to saturate the root zones, then let the soil dry. Roots are generally within the top 6 inches of soil. Watering too frequently results in shallow roots, weed growth, disease and fungus.
- Don't water too long. Water each zone several times for short periods rather than in one long session. For example, rather than watering for 15 minutes, water three times for 5 minutes, allowing time for the water to soak into the ground between sessions. This reduces run-off.
- Be sure your sprinklers are not watering driveways, sidewalks, patios, or buildings.

### Maintenance

As Flury puts it, like most things in life, an irrigation system will require periodic maintenance. Plant material grows and after a few years the head placement will need to change to accommodate the plant's new size and shape. “A “Spring Start Up” and a “Winterization” in the mid-Atlantic region are necessary annual requirements,” he explains. “These will keep coverage as it was intended and help protect your irrigation and plant investment.”

### Choosing a Contractor

Any irrigation system will perform best if it is designed and installed correctly with quality components and well managed and maintained. It's a good idea to hire a Certified Irrigation Designer or Contractor proficient in industry best practices to design, install and maintain a new system. A list of certified individuals by region is available at [www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org). Always be sure to check the credentials of a prospective contractor, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Find out if the contractor has a license, if a license is required in your area, and ask about insurance. 

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