

Not too late in the season for an irrigation system

BY MICHELLE ARNTZ
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Halfway through the year, residents are managing to water gardens and grass with roughly half the precipitation. If your lawn looks a little sad, this may be the year to install an underground sprinkler system.

It is not too late to save your parched lawn, according to Matt Welch, an irrigation specialist with Traverse Outdoors.

"A good week of watering will revive the driest of lawns," said Welch, adding that a healthy lawn is more disease and pest resistant. A well-planned irrigation system will save the homeowner the hassle of dragging the garden hose around while trying in vain to evenly quench a lawn's thirst. If you are watering your lawn with hoses, your home can support a sprinkler system in most cases, Welch said.

"Problems are with old, galvanized city water service lines. They are full of calcium deposits, which severely limit water flow," Welch said. "This problem is very obvious to the homeowner because they can't do laundry and take a shower at the same time."

The flow rate is tested by turning on an outside faucet full blast. Time how many seconds it takes to fill a one-gallon container, then divide by 60.

The sprinkler system rate is then found by adding up the gallons per minute needed for each sprinkler head. Systems can use 60 to 75 percent of the home flow rate. A system that uses more than 75 percent will require smaller or fewer heads.

"Systems are designed based on plant material, customer needs, sun exposure, soil, water availability, budget, slope, etc," Welch said. "Each job is unique and must be specifically designed for the site."

Although Welch agreed that someone with "basic construction knowledge" is capable of installing underground sprinklers, he thinks that some of the project should be hired out.

"It is best to hire a professional design person to lay out the system. All factors have to be considered. A simple miscalculation in the beginning can result in a system which does not function. And once it is buried, it is difficult to fix," he said.

For the budget conscious, contractors will quote a DIY system, saving 20-40 percent while getting a quality system.

"They may provide materials, layout, pipe installation, connection to the homes water supply, etc," Welch said.

He warns that when choosing a contractor and a sprinkler system, it is buyer beware. Welch advises the consumer to shop for a contractor, looking for those with an Irrigation Association certification. Designers and installers with this certification have completed at least three years of extensive study and have been tested by IA on subjects such as hydraulics, electricity, and pumps.

Having seen questionable work done by some contractors, Welch said that he strongly encourages people to work with the Irrigation Association to find a reputable company.

Dorian Dobias from Dobias Landscaping and Garden Center agrees with Welch that it is not too late for your lawn to make a full recuperation from the heat and lack of rainfall.

"Our experience in Michigan is that the summer months of July and August are usually dry. By installing an irrigation system in the summer, the appearance of your yard will be vastly improved," said Dobias.

Another advantage of having an underground sprinkler system on the property is that it lends to the resale value, according to Dobias.

Dobias Landscaping installs systems for realtors and individuals with homes on the market.

"By dressing up the front foundation of a house with colorful shrubs, perennials, and adding a couple of trees, the lawn will sell the home. It is a great benefit to have the plants under an automatic drip irrigation system," Dobias said.

He added that most irrigation manufacturers guarantee the sprinkler heads, valves and timers for two to five years.

Lou Henges, owner of Man and Tractor in Buckley, has been improving landscapes with his family-operated business for the last 12 years. 95 percent of his customers come from satisfied customer referrals.

"Our systems have a two-year parts warranty. All systems may need maintenance, but they should last a lifetime," said Henges.

Servicing Grand Traverse, Benzie, Leelanau and Wexford counties, Lou manages to get out to a property within a week.

"Irrigation estimates are free. We come to the home, lay out the sprinkler system as to what area the homeowner wants irrigated. The cost depends on the number of sprinkler heads, at \$95 per sprinkler head," said Henges, adding that the average site is around \$2,400 to \$3,200 installed.

He adds that when working with newly built homes, yard preparation should be done before installing an irrigation system. Seeding and fertilizing would follow.

The local hardware store is a good source of information for those homeowners wanting to install their own underground sprinklers.

According to information found on the Do-It-Yourself Web site, the first thing a homeowner needs to do before installing a system is sketch the layout of the property, including the house, garage, trees and driveway. With that information, a hardware store should be able to help you calculate how much PVC or CPVC pipe, connectors, elbows and T-fittings that are necessary to complete the project.

The installer needs to test the water flow rate to figure the proper pipe size needed. Sprinkler heads need to be chosen thoughtfully as they vary in design, depending on whether it is for irrigating trees, shrubs or grass. Now designed to use a lower water rate, most heads will cover 45 to 360 degrees.

If your home does not have a stop valve, one will have to be installed. This valve separates the water destined for your sprinkler system from the house water. It is suggested that a drain be put in to winterize the system in the fall.

Once the system is designed, the homeowner must dig the trench nine inches deep and it should be as wide as a shovel. Sloping the pipes 1/4 inch deeper every five feet allows the pipes to drain. Use one inch of gravel to line the trench. Mark where the heads will be placed with a stake. After installing the valves and pipes, the sprinkler heads are attached to the risers.

To ensure that the solvents used during installations are dry, wait 24 hours to test the system. Leaks and cracks can be plugged with plastic solvent cement and plastic electrical tape. Once the system is tested to satisfaction, fill in the trenches with sod and dirt.

The homeowner should be aware of local building and water codes that may restrict the ground sprinkler system.

Sources:
www.irrigation.org
state by state
tified irrigation
<http://doityourself.com>
more direct
install your
system.
www.dobias.com
Man and Tractor
Call: 231-888-280-6830

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HOME HOW-TO

Clean, don't paint siding

To restore its appearance, siding needs regular cleaning. Painting should be one of the last considerations if you are seeking a cosmetic color change.

TO CLEAN SIDING

- Use a power washer to completely clean the aluminum of dirt, grease and oil and chalking.
- Follow manufacturer's directions carefully and take care not to spray directly at windows, electric outlets, vents or electric lines.
- Keep the nozzle at least 12 inches away from the surface and don't spray upward at the siding, right (powerful water spray can loosen or damage the siding and result in moisture getting trapped underneath the panels).
- Use a soft-bristle brush, such as an auto-washing brush, and a solution of regular household detergent or 1 quart liquid laundry bleach combined with 3 quarts of water or a mix of

one-third cup detergent with two-thirds TSP (trisodium phosphate) and rinse thoroughly.

! Don't spray upward at the siding or water damage may result.



**Some home centers sell special aluminum-siding cleaners containing heavy-duty cleaning agents.*

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