

UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

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Top 10 Lawn & Landscape Irrigation Tips

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The good news about lawn and landscape irrigation is that you can have your cake and eat it, too! Lawns and landscapes can be designed and maintained to be good looking and water conserving. From the home office in Wahoo, NE, following are 10 useful tips (David Letterman style) to accomplish both objectives.

10. Monitor system output. Measure the amount of water applied in a 15 minute period using collection devices such as tuna or coffee cans. Adjust the runtime to deliver the required amount.

9. Know how much water is needed. Kentucky bluegrass lawns, in general, require 1 inch per week in April and May, 1-1/4 inch per week in June, 1-1/2 in July and August, 1 - 1/4 in September and 1 inch in October.

8. Measure water penetration. Use a screwdriver or soil probe to measure moisture (rainfall + irrigation water) penetration into the lawn.

7. Water to the bottom of the roots. Use a small shovel to determine how deep the roots are. Actually the soil should be kept moist to about half an inch deeper than the deepest roots to encourage downward growth. Roots are shallow in summer and deeper in spring/fall.

6. When watering on a slope, use “delayed starts.” Run your sprinklers until you notice runoff, then stop. Wait 3 hours, then resume. Aerate to increase infiltration.

5. Water in the early morning (4am to 10am). This allows the grass blades to dry, making them less susceptible to foliar diseases. Watering is more efficient in morning due to less evaporation and wind speed. Change the time that your system runs monthly, or at least seasonally. Contact a lawn sprinkler professional if you need help.

4. Observe your sprinkler system once per month. Look for heads that don't turn, heads that spray into the street or onto a sidewalk, bent or damaged heads, clogged or worn nozzles or orifices, turf growth around heads that impede water delivery, puddling and runoff.

3. Monitor the spray patterns. Adjust heads as landscape plants grow larger and begin to block the spray pattern. New installations of benches, decks, etc. can also decrease irrigation efficiency.

2. On days when temperatures are above 90°F, run your sprinklers 5 to 10 minutes per zone in the afternoon to cool the turf and reduce stress. This is called "spritizing," and it reduces the symptoms of summer patch disease.

1. Create water zones by putting plants together that have similar water needs. Each turf species has a different water requirement which is also distinct from ornamentals. Ornamental plants should be grouped into low, moderate and high water users. Each zone of plants should be irrigated according to its needs.