

# In drought conditions learn to use water efficiently

John Brooks

Automatic irrigation systems are a real time-saver for those with property to maintain, but they can't be just ignored after they've been installed — and the monitoring is especially important under this year's drought conditions, according to the experts.

Components wear out, become damaged, get nudged out of position and the system itself gradually gets in need of seasonal and weather changes.

Automated irrigation systems need a little guidance and monitoring to ensure they're not wasting water. In fact, it would be wise to do a check on the system once a month, suggests Bruce Naka, a certified irrigation system designer and consultant. He has more than 25 years' experience in the Okanagan and is certified by the Irrigation Industry Association of BC (IIAIB).

The first thing to look for is spots in your landscape that are either too wet or too dry after the system has been on. In particular, he suggests you make sure it's not watering concrete, asphalt or siding. In some cases, a sprinkler head just needs to be adjusted, but in others, it could be worn out and need replacing.

"You can save money and conserve water by ensuring your system is working right," he says.

Under drought conditions such as the Okanagan is experiencing this year, you may wish to turn off the zones that water your lawn and let the grass dormancy for the remainder of the season or you may decide to water the lawn less often. A rule of thumb is to water only just over an inch of water a week (Cortina says) for a Make Water Work water-measuring device, or pit it in a

can, to measure how much it gets now.

However, Naka points out it's important to know what type of soil your lawn is in. It would need less if it's in a clay soil base, and more if sand or gravel. "Lawn will come back. Many trees and shrubs won't. So, to use the water you have most efficiently, concentrate on the shrubs and let the lawn go," he advises. Conserve water by ensuring your irrigation system does deep watering for trees and shrubs.

He also recommends mowing your lawn to be drought-tolerant by not providing them with more than the minimum amount of water they need to survive. That way, they will grow deep roots and be healthier overall.

If you're looking at installing an automatic irrigation system, he recommends you look for a certified contractor. Go to the IIABC website for a list of irrigation.com.

Ask your installer about high efficiency nozzles and you can, you are familiar with the controller and dia you can program it before the work is finished. They should also provide you with a drawing of the system, including where all the valves are, so you can shut them off, if necessary.

If purchasing a home, ask for a map of the system showing where the valves and sprinkler heads are.

Most systems now have rain sensors which can be added to the system that shut down when there's enough rain, and there's a rain water station which can be added in some, which measures evapotranspiration rates, so water use is reduced when it's cooler.

With 20 per cent of all Okanagan water used on household lawns and gardens, and

less water available per person than anywhere in Canada, valley residents are encouraged to reduce outdoor water use this summer.

Take the pledge to Make Water Work at [www.MakeWaterWork.ca](http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca) for your chance to win over \$8,000 in prizes, including a Grand Prize of a \$6,000 WaterWise yard upgrade!

Take the pledge to Water plants. Not pavement.

Water between dusk and dawn.

Don't mow. Let it Grow. Lawn lawns 5-8 cm (2-3 inches) tall.

Leave grass clippings to mulch.

Top dress with compost.

Change out some lawn for drought-tolerant turf and/or native and low-water variety plants.

Make Water Work is an initiative of the Okanagan Basin Water Board and the Okanagan IIABC program.



Bruce Naka illustrates an efficient sprinkler head.

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