

Use Rain Shutoff Device on Sprinkler Systems

By Larry Williams

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It always amazes me that even under flood conditions people still water their lawns. I'm sure you've seen it too. We get enough rain to cause some areas to literally flood and you still see the irrigation systems going full blast.

We should water our lawns, landscapes, and gardens on an as-needed basis. There is nothing on this planet that is living that requires water on any kind of schedule. The way that many people water their lawns is as logical as saying that a pet dog needs a drink of water at 4:00 p.m. every day. This is absolutely not true. All we are doing when we irrigate is replacing water that is lost. This is true when we drink water ourselves, when we provide water for a pet dog or when we provide water for our lawns, landscapes and gardens.

When the soil is already saturated you can't add more water. When a glass is full of water, you can't add more until some water is removed.

An irrigation system is a great tool when used to supplement rainfall. But it becomes a lousy tool when set to come on too frequently. Irrigating too much not only wastes water but it also is the cause for many lawn problems such as shallow, weak root systems, leaching of fertilizer, and numerous lawn diseases. Cutting the irrigation timer to off and operating the system manually would solve many lawn problems.

Also, there are tools to prevent an irrigation system from coming on during rain or when adequate rainfall has occurred. As a matter of fact, it has been state law in Florida for every automatic irrigation system to have a rain shutoff device installed since 1991.

Florida Statutes, Chapter 373.62 – Water conservation; automatic sprinkler systems, reads as follows. “Any person who purchases and installs an automatic lawn sprinkler system after May 1, 1991 , shall install a rain sensor device or switch which will override the irrigation cycle of the sprinkler system when adequate rainfall has occurred...”

These devices are fairly available, inexpensive (\$20 to \$30 range) and are not difficult to install. Rain shutoff devices really do work when installed properly. If you do not feel qualified to install such a device on an existing system, check with a reputable irrigation company.

Water only when the lawn indicates that water is needed. When the grass needs water, leaf blades fold along the midrib - like a book closing, footprints remain in the lawn long after being made, and the lawn turns grayish in spots, indicating it needs water.

When 30 to 40 percent of the lawn shows these signs of water need, turn the irrigation system on and let it run long enough to apply one-half to three-quarters inch of water. Don't water again until the lawn begins to show these signs of water need. Watering this way will develop a deep-rooted lawn and landscape.

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