

Set your Sprinkler System for Sun – or Rain

Written by Mike Tenn

Automatic sprinkler systems aren't completely automatic – for example, they don't adjust themselves when the weather gets hotter, or when it rains. Remember the needs of your lawn and garden, and make sure you aren't depriving them or watering unnecessarily.

Get into the “Zone”

Automatic sprinkler systems have multiple “zones” each controlled by its own solenoid valve. This way, you can customize your sprinklers system to different needs of your lawn and garden; established shrubs may only need to be watered for a few minutes once or twice a week, while the lawn will need more water more frequently during hot weather.

To program your system you must set your controller – the “brain” of your system. There are three types of controllers: electro-mechanical, solid state, and hybrid. The most popular type of residential controllers are hybrid, which combine the versatility of solid state operation with the convenience of mechanical programming.

Rain Gauges and Moisture Sensors

Watering your lawn and garden when it's raining isn't just redundant – it also wastes water. To prevent this, you can install one of several different sensors that will automatically shut off your system if it starts to rain.

One type of rain gauge is a small catch device that mounts on the eaves of your house and is wired into the common wire of the sprinkler system. If enough rain collects inside the sensor, it will immediately shut down your system. However, this type of sensor must be checked periodically to ensure no leaves or debris accumulate in it.

You won't have that problem with moisture sensors, which work similarly to rain gauges. Instead of a catch device, it consists of a wafer material that senses moisture.

Another option is a soil probe moisture sensor. When inserted into the soil, they turn off the system if moisture in the soil rises above a certain point. However, with this device, the irrigation water itself can shut the system down, depriving other zones of needed water.

Water for your landscape's needs! Automatic sprinkler systems can be a great convenience – but remember to adjust them when needed.