



With warm temperatures settling in, it is time to turn your irrigation system back on from its winter break. Before turning your system on for the spring and summer months, you need to test it to make sure your plants are being watered effectively and water is not being wasted. This not only results in water savings, but money saved as well. Here are some helpful tips to assist you in achieving a successful start up of your irrigation system:

First, inspect your irrigation system by turning the system on and walking around your yard; you can turn your irrigation system on manually from your controller or your valve box. Make sure water is only being used to water plants and not creating wet spots where plants are not. If you see water leaving the system where no plant is present, you may be able to solve the problem by plugging the ¼" irrigation drip tube that is commonly used. The appropriate plugs are available at any hardware store. Also, check the location of drip emitters, as these can easily be moved by pets and yard maintenance activities. Position emitters to supply water to the entire root zone, which is typically about 50% larger than the top of the plant. If plants are on a slope, make sure to position the emitter on the high side of the root ball to take advantage of the water flowing downhill.



Take advantage of rainfall. Turn irrigation clocks off and monitor soil moisture and plant condition to determine when more water is needed



Make sure all nozzles are pointing in the right direction to ensure the intended area is being sprayed

If you have turf, make sure sprinkler heads pop-up and are not stuck in the ground. You should also check to see that heads are pointed in the right direction and are spraying the intended pattern. Nozzles can become clogged by sand, rocks or other debris which you may be able to clean out with a screwdriver or pocketknife. If you cannot unclog the nozzle, replacement is necessary.

Once you have checked that the water delivery system is functioning correctly, move on to your irrigation controller. Sometimes, power failures or other factors can cause the controller to return to a default schedule, which may not be appropriate for the current weather conditions. If needed, reset the controller and enter a schedule appropriate for the needs of your landscape. You can use the interactive tools at [wateruseitwisely.com](http://wateruseitwisely.com) to determine how often and how long the various stations on your controller should run.

Finally, do a reality check. You want to make sure moisture from your irrigation system is actually reaching the root zone of your plants. To test the depth the water is reaching, use a long screwdriver, piece of rebar or purchase a soil probe. A screwdriver will move easily through most soil when it is wet, but will stop when it reaches dry soil. The roots of most shrubs are





not more than 6" to 18" deep and even a large tree will have most of its roots within the first 24" of soil. For turf, getting moisture to a depth of 6" should be sufficient.

As the weather and other factors change, you will need to adjust your watering frequency, days and run time. It is important to adjust your watering schedule monthly to account for temperature and moisture changes in the environment. After it rains, turn your irrigation system off completely. Monitor soil moisture and carefully observe the condition of your plants and turf before turning the system on again.

There are also a number of resources on the internet that can help you find information on how to maintain your plants and irrigation system. The Weather Channel ([www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)) has an excellent website with watering information. If you have other questions regarding your own landscape, a great reference is available through the University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension website at <http://www.ag.arizona.edu/maricopa/garden/>.



### Try It Yourself!

Many landscapers and homeowners tend to over water landscape material. Use a screwdriver to test your yard. If the screwdriver goes in easily to approximately 6", there is plenty of moisture in the soil. If not, you need to give your plant material more water.



How Much & How Often <small>Water to the outer edge of the plant's canopy and to the depth indicated. Watering frequency will vary depending on season, plant type, weather and soil.</small>		Seasonal Frequency — Days Between Waterings				Water This Deeply (Typical Root Depth)
		Spring Mar - May	Summer May - Oct	Fall Oct - Dec	Winter Dec - Mar	
Trees	Desert adapted	14-30 days	7-21 days	14-30 days	30-60 days	24-36 inches
	High water use	7-12 days	7-10 days	7-12 days	14-30 days	24-36 inches
Shrubs	Desert adapted	14-30 days	7-21 days	14-30 days	30-45 days	18-24 inches
	High water use	7-10 days	5-7 days	7-10 days	10-14 days	18-24 inches
Groundcovers & Vines	Desert adapted	14-30 days	7-21 days	14-30 days	21-45 days	8-12 inches
	High water use	7-10 days	2-5 days	7-10 days	10-14 days	8-12 inches
Cacti and Succulents		21-45 days	14-30 days	21-45 days	if needed	8-12 inches
Annuals		3-7 days	2-5 days	3-7 days	5-10 days	8-12 inches
Warm Season Grass		4-14 days	3-6 days	6-21 days	15-30 days	6-10 inches
Cool Season Grass		3-7 days	none	3-10 days	7-14 days	6-10 inches

These guidelines are for established plants (1 year for shrubs, 3 years for trees). Additional water is needed for new plantings or unusually hot or dry weather. Less water is needed during cool or rainy weather. Drip run times are typically 2 hours or more for each watering.

The best way to control your irrigation water use is to know the unique conditions of your property. Run times on drip irrigation to ground cover plants should be long enough to saturate the root zone of the plant. With the exception of flowers, this chart is designed for established plants that have been in the ground for more than 2 years; new plant material may need water for 1-2 years after installation.

