

## Reduce and Reuse in Your Landscape

By Dawn Donovan

Every April, many of us gather together to celebrate Earth Day in our communities. We learn about the different ways we can reduce our waste, reuse materials and recycle. This year why not make a commitment to make a change in your landscape which will help the environment and reduce your water bill.

Water is a precious resource especially in the desert climate of northern Nevada. We want to make sure we are using it efficiently inside and outside of our homes. Many of us have seen low flow fixtures and other devices for the inside of our home in our local stores or even own them. However, when it comes to water-saving practices, devices and technology for our landscapes, it's a different story. Many of these are directed to landscape professionals instead of homeowners.

Ironically, most landscape plants that do not make it die from overwatering. Typically, when a homeowner sees a plant suffering, his first reaction is to increase the watering time. Too much water will suffocate plants and kill them just as easily as not watering can.

So how do you find the balance between giving adequate moisture to your plants and being water-wise? As a homeowner, you should be knowledgeable about your existing irrigation system -- how it works, how to program the controller, how much time is required for the different plant material and turf, etc. Your system should be inspected regularly for leaks, broken/clogged heads and emitters, inadequate coverage and runoff.

Start with your turf. It can be difficult to devise an irrigation schedule and system that will be the most efficient for your turf. Armed with a stopwatch, turn on your irrigation system; observe how the water sprays across the turf and note the amount of time it takes until the water begins to run off the lawn. Then check the zones which use drip to water trees, shrubs and other plants. Use this as a base time for your sprinkler. Check your controller and adjust the time to match your stopwatch. Allow the water time to soak into the soil before you run the next cycle. Note that the length and frequency of watering cycles depend on soil type, time of the year and how much sun the area receives.

There are now new types of spray/rotor heads that can be used in your landscape. Many are specifically designed to be adjustable, have matched precipitation rates, and use less water. These are fairly simple to change out in your yard. You can talk to a professional about your water goals and they can help you make changes in your turf irrigation.

For an easy transition that is more comprehensive, consider upgrading your existing controller to a “smart controller.” There are products available now that work with existing controllers, and if set up properly, a smart controller will need minimal adjustments throughout the season. This will make it very easy for a homeowner to make a small investment in their irrigation and significantly reduce water usage. A smart controller monitors the amount of water and frequency for both turf and drip by using built-in sensors and local weather information. By using plant and soil information and sun/shade conditions in your landscape along with local weather data, your plants, it automatically dispenses the right amount of water throughout the growing season. A controller like this can help reduce your water use by 15-30%.

Another option is a smart controller/irrigation clock built into one console. If you are upgrading your entire irrigation system or installing a new one, this should definitely be considered; it takes up less space and is more efficient.

I highly recommend contacting a certified irrigation auditor to conduct an audit of your existing irrigation system. This trained professional will be able to determine how efficient your system is and make recommendations to improve its efficiency. Or a knowledgeable irrigation specialist can inspect your system to determine if it is functioning properly – the timer is set properly, there are no leaks, broken or clogged heads or emitters, inadequate coverage, etc.

For a system upgrade to new smart technology, consult a local EPA WaterSense partner who has been through rigorous training. These individuals can evaluate your existing system and determine what new technology would help you the most. Visit [www.epa.gov/watersense](http://www.epa.gov/watersense) to find local partners.