

The Watering Hile

Irrigation System Routine Maintenance

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Ah, spring... beautiful, sunny, seventy-five degree days. It's perfect weather for gardening, but it's also an especially good time for some irrigation system maintenance. Irrigation problems are not always apparent between the cool nighttime temperatures, the periodic cloudy days and even the occasional sprinkle of rain. So don't wait until the heat sets in and the system is providing a lifeline to your plants.

General Watering System

Inspect all components of your watering system from the backflow preventer to the valves.

- ❑ Check that the controller program is correct.
- ❑ If the controller has battery backup power, replace the battery yearly.
- ❑ Operate each station to make sure valves are opening and closing properly. Open the valve box while the system is running and check for valve leaks.
- ❑ Check for leaks, standing water, soggy ground and eroded soil.
- ❑ Inspect filter screens for holes or calcium buildup. Replace if it has holes, and soak screen in a 50-50 vinegar-water solution to remove calcium.
- ❑ After making all repairs or adjustments, flush each line for about a minute. Do this by removing the end-cap and turning on the valve (there should be an exposed cap you can unscrew at the end of each line, or sometimes the irrigation tubing is just kinked over and held in place).

Sprinklers

- ❑ Replace broken or missing sprinkler heads.
- ❑ Don't mix head types on the same system.
- ❑ Check that sprinkler heads are flush with the soil surface and straight, not tilted.
- ❑ Clear grass, plants and other obstructions that block sprinkler spray.
- ❑ Adjust sprinkler heads so they don't spray walls, driveways or sidewalks.
- ❑ If you've never done so, perform a sprinkler can test (or audit) to determine how long to run your irrigation for greatest water efficiency. Learn how in *Landscape Watering by the Numbers* guide at www.wateruseitwisely.com/arizona.

Drip or Bubbler System

Turn on the system 20-30 minutes before and during the inspection to allow enough time for emitter wetting patterns to show.

- ❑ Fix and replace clogged or missing emitters (always cut off old emitters – don't pull them off).
- ❑ Repair or replace damaged bubblers. Some bubblers are adjustable. Check flow for proper setting.
- ❑ Move emitters out to drip line as plants grow or adjust bubbler basin sizes. Learn how many emitters in "Watering Adjustments as Plants Grow" on our water conservation site at www.mesaaz.gov/conservation.