

Spring is the Perfect Time for a Sprinkler Tune-up

By [Melissa Baum-Haley](#), Ph.D., Water Use Efficiency Programs Specialist

Spring is finally here! The short days of winter have come to an end. The sun's rays are glowing brighter, flowers are beginning to bloom, and grass is greening-up. Now is perfect for a spring-time sprinkler tune-up. Make sure your sprinklers are working correctly and your system is irrigating efficiently. Below are some suggestions to help you improve your irrigation efficiency as well as a list of six common irrigation errors to avoid.

Increasing the efficiency of your irrigation system can be accomplished by following this checklist:

- ✓ Perform regular maintenance by turning on all irrigation zones. Check for leaks and that all sprinkler heads are operating properly.
- ✓ Adjust sprinklers to avoid spraying buildings, driveways, streets, and sidewalks. In addition, be certain that plants or structures do not interfere with the irrigation spray pattern.
- ✓ Make sure there is a functioning rain shutoff device placed in an unobstructed location.
- ✓ Separate the irrigation system into multiple zones and water only those areas that need it.
- ✓ Use your programmable timer to water different areas of the landscape for different lengths of time.
- ✓ Use drip or micro-irrigation in ornamental planting areas. Drip and micro-irrigation apply water more efficiently by dispensing water slowly near the base of the plant, reducing runoff and evaporation.

Did you know?

The iron stains on this fence are the result of a sprinkler radius that is too large.



Replacing the sprinkler heads with nozzles with smaller radii would reduce this staining and keep the fence from needing constant repainting.



The 6 most common irrigation errors:

1. **Broken or misdirected sprinklers.**
2. **Sprinkler spray pattern obstructed by plant parts or grass blades.** These include branches, trunks, or leaves that can cause the spray pattern to be uneven.
3. **Mixed sprinkler head types.** For example, when stationary shrub spray heads and rotating turf sprinklers are used in the same irrigation zone, the shrubs usually end up being overwatered.
4. **Unmatched precipitation rates.** The flow rate (amount of water applied per minute) of a sprinkler with a quarter-circle spray pattern should be $\frac{1}{2}$ the amount of the same type of sprinkler with half-circle coverage, and a $\frac{1}{4}$ of the flow rate of a full-circle sprinkler.
5. **Improperly spaced sprinklers.** Space the lawn sprinklers for the water from one sprinkler just reaches the adjacent sprinkler head(s), ensuring uniform watering. This is a term referred to as head-to-head coverage.
6. **Irrigation scheduled incorrectly.** Irrigation controllers are often set to run too frequently or for too long per irrigation event.

Want to learn more about your irrigation system and how to set a watering schedule for your unique lawn and landscape? Here are helpful worksheets so you can be Water Smart!