

## WATER IN THE DESERT SOUTHWEST

As we know, the cost of water will never decrease and with our extended drought conditions in the West, communities will be forced to choose how much water can be devoted to the landscape. Turf is the largest water user in the landscape, and we will need to be vigilant on how much turf we have and do we need to over seed in the fall. The near future may bring water restrictions and it is best to have these conversations now to be prepared for what may come.

As has been mentioned in the past, the criteria for turf should be functional and esthetic. If it cannot fit both categories, it should be considered for removal to save water. Turf will use 4 times the amount of water annually than trees and shrubs. Eventually, small decorative, but not functional pieces of turf, will need to be eliminated due to difficulty in watering without runoff. We have all seen water running down the gutters in the street and if followed to the source, many times it will lead to a poorly planned turf patch being overwatered. There have been large strides in the quality and look of artificial turf. This option may be available instead of live turf and will save water, labor and material costs of maintaining live turf.

We often are asked for recommendations on run times and frequencies on irrigation systems by our clients. While every irrigation system is unique, one thing remains true...deep and infrequent watering is the best for desert plants. The logic is to drive the root mass lower into the cooler temperatures of the soil. Frequent and shallow watering results in roots staying close to the surface where soil temperatures are hottest. Too often, landscapers and homeowners run a winter and summer schedule on their irrigation systems, the classic set and forget! SDL recommends weekly checks to assure the system is functioning properly and there are no broken heads, emitters or leaks. Listed below is a typical program for successful watering in winter and summer months with hybrid settings in the fall and spring.

### WINTER SCHEDULE

- Turf – 3 days per week for 5 – 7 minutes for pop up heads
- Turf – 3 days per week for 15 – 25 minutes for rotors
- Trees – 1 day per week for 2 hours if drip emitters (be sure the entire root ball is covered)
- Shrubs – 2 days per week for 1 hour
- Flowers – check moisture in soil and water to a depth of the root mass (each flower bed is unique based on exposure)

### SPRING SCHEDULE

Gradually increase days on and run times as temperatures begin to get into the 80's and 90's.

### SUMMER SCHEDULE

- Turf – 4 to 5 days per week for 5-10 minutes for pop up heads
- Turf – 4 to 5 days per week for 25-45 minutes for rotor heads
- Trees – 2-3 days per week for 2 hours for drip emitters (be sure the entire root ball is covered)
- Shrubs – 3 - 4 days per week for 1 hour
- Flowers – check moisture in soil and water to a depth of the root mass (each flower bed is unique based on exposure)

## FALL SCHEDULE

Gradually decrease days on and run times as the weather increasingly cools down.

Use your eyes to look for stress in the landscape and adjust accordingly. Most people over water as opposed to under water. The real key is to water minimally and gradually increase after seeing the reactions from your turf, plants, trees and flowers. I often joke with our irrigation techs about not getting paid by the gallon used, but we get paid by gallons saved. It is a mind set that everyone can adapt to easily if they understand watering practices. If you have hired a landscape contractor to maintain your home, the question to ask monthly is how often the irrigation runs and for how long. I think you'll be amazed at the huge variations in answers you'll get. Another tip is to shut off the system for 3 days after a rainfall of 0.25". Again, each system and landscape are different, but 3 days for a quarter of an inch of rain has served us well in the past and saved thousands of gallons of water. If leaving town for an extended period, have a neighbor or your landscape contractor keep an eye on the irrigation system until you return.

Each of us can do our part in saving water and remember, knowledge is power.