

Residential irrigation system maintenance  
A handy guide for getting the most out of your irrigation system  
And for a healthy and attractive lawn

Does your irrigation system require maintenance? --- It sure does --- Can you do it yourself? --- Yes --- and following are guide lines, or if you are like most of us, it's a lot easier and safer to contract the ongoing maintenance of your system with an irrigation specialist. We recommend a minimum of quarterly visits. And for our many "snow birds" and rental properties, this assures someone will be checking on your system during your absence. This is important, for much can go wrong with your system, particularly in the summer, and often involving our frequent lightning storms and power surges. A system failure during the hot summer months could destroy your lawn.

Our Central system is plumbed to and connected to each residence. Each residence has a control box which is linked to solenoids that control the irrigation for each zone on your property. Before the water reaches the solenoids it passes through a filter designed to keep matter out of the solenoids and out of the sprinkler heads, which also have filters.

At the rear of your property are two control boxes with flush green covers. Under one cover your systems main filter is located. This filter should be inspected at least quarterly and removed and cleaned as necessary. Under the second cover is where your systems solenoids are located. These mechanical/electrical devices open and close in accordance with your control box irrigation schedule. Your system will have a solenoid for each zone on your property. These devices require no maintenance but they do fail and then have to be replaced. Home owners can do the replacement but this is a job best handled by an irrigation specialist.

Typically each residence will have two types of sprinklers, pop-ups and rotaries. The pop ups provide a constant watering pattern while the rotaries, as the name implies, go back and forth over a designated area. To assure an equal amount of irrigation water rotary zones are programmed to receive more of irrigation water than the pop-ups.

**Do the sprinkler heads require maintenance?** Yes they do. Each head has a filter which should be checked quarterly but at least twice per year. You will need a tool to raise up the sprinkler heads and then to lock the head in place, (available at your local hardware store). Once the head is raised the top of the head twists off revealing the tubular filter which should be cleaned.

Anything else?? Spray patterns. Both your pop up and rotary heads are adjustable and were installed to provide coverage to a predetermined area. These areas include irrigation adjacent to side-walks and driveways. Over time sprinkler heads become misaligned and that's why you see our roads and driveways being watered. Using the same tool you used to clean the filters you can raise up the sprinkler head and realign it to restore the desired spray pattern.

**Landscaping and planting beds.** Ever notice shrubs and ornamentals blocking the spray pattern of sprinklers? Well, when the system was installed the plants were much smaller, and plants in Florida grow like crazy. Another common reason involves your lawn service company chopping

off of the sprinkler stem when trimming your shrubs. Your lawn service company keeps a supply of sprinkler heads on their trucks for that reason. The problem is that they do not replace or restore the sprinkler shaft to its original length. So periodically you should review your planting beds to make sure your sprinklers are doing their job and adding height as necessary.

What else?? Most of our lawns are a grass variety called St Augustine. St. Augustine grass is a moderate to high maintenance lawn because it requires fertile, well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter, and needs regular fertilization, water, and mowing. Even in decent soils, St. Augustine grass requires regular, high nitrogen, fertilizer. Our Westminster soil is awful and regular fertilizing is essential for a good looking lawn. When you drive through Westminster it's easy to spot the difference between a lawn receiving regular fertilizer treatment and irrigation and those that do not. The latter lawn is closer to yellow than green and usually has lots of weeds.

One attribute of St Augustine is the fact that it spreads by creeping (a lot like northern witch grass). Without ongoing attention to your sprinkler heads, the grass grows over the heads and prevents the heads from popping up. It's for this reason your local hardware store has a stock of circular cement rings to slow down the infiltration of this grass. Or you can simply get a trowel and chop the grass from around the sprinkler heads.

What if I don't want to or cannot perform the necessary routine maintenance as described above? Call our association office. We have a list of local companies performing maintenance on residential systems. Or you can simply use the Yellow Pages or do a Google search for local companies. Most will provide a regularly scheduled service which we highly recommend. A service contract will assure that someone is taking a regular look at your system and dealing with issues before they become real problems.