drip irrigation) or microsprays. With microirrigation, water can be directed to the root zone, where plants need it most. Learn more at www.epa.gov/watersense/microirrigation.

Select a WaterSense Labeled Irrigation Controller

Irrigation controllers, normally located inside the garage or on an outside wall, automatically activate your system. They can be clock-timed controllers, or smart controllers that schedule irrigation based on the weather or moisture in the soil. WaterSense labeled weather-based irrigation controllers do the thinking for you in terms of when and how much to water, based on local weather and landscape conditions. When installed and programmed properly, WaterSense labeled irrigation controllers can save an average home nearly 7,600 gallons of water annually over a clock-timed controller. If you're not ready to replace your controller, there are WaterSense labeled models that upgrade your existing controller to make it weather-based. Learn more at www.epa.gov/watersense/irrigation-controllers.

If you're not ready to replace your clock-timed irrigation controller, update it with the seasons to avoid overwatering during rainy months or cooler temperatures. If you notice that runoff occurs when you water, consider breaking up the irrigation into smaller intervals with breaks in between to allow the water to seep into the soil. For tips on adjusting your irrigation controller, visit www.epa.gov/watersense/watering-tips.

For more information about sprucing up your sprinkler and other smart watering ideas, visit www.epa.gov/watersense/outdoors.

Cover controller image courtesy of Rachio; back page controller and interior spread valve box photo courtesy of Hunter Industries Incorporated; and interior spread sprinkler photos courtesy of Rain Bird Incorporated.

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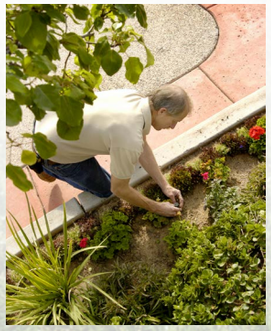
It's Time to Start a Sprinkler Spruce-Up!

Do you use an in-ground irrigation system to water plants in your landscape? Then it's a good idea to periodically check it to make sure all the components are working properly, including valves, filters, backflow preventers, pressure regulators, pipes, sprinklers, microirrigation lines, and the controller.

If your water bill is higher this watering season than it was the same time last year, it could be the sign of a leak. Components can be disturbed or damaged due to winter's cold, ice, or snow, so the start of the watering season is the perfect time to spruce up your sprinkler system. A sprinkler spruce-up involves four simple steps: inspect, connect, direct, and select.

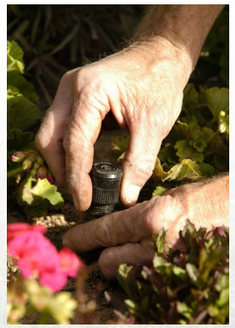
Inspect for Breaks and Leaks

Missing or broken sprinkler heads can waste water and damage your plants by spraying water where it isn't needed. Breaks might be hard to spot if your system runs overnight or early in the morning. One way to find broken heads and leaks is to turn on each irrigation zone separately, then look for heads that do not pop up fully, are tilted, or are missing entirely. Make sure sprinklers aren't blocked by rocks, debris, or foliage. When the sprinkler is running, check for misting or overspray, which could be a sign that the water pressure is too high. A pressure regulator can reduce system pressure, and/or you can install WaterSense labeled spray sprinkler bodies, which have pressure regulation built in.



Connect Sprinklers, Pipes, and Valves

Leaks can also occur at the joints between sprinklers and the piping. Your irrigation professional can identify whether the joint is broken or if the sprinkler needs to be tightened. Leaking joints can also be a sign of too much water pressure or particles in the water. Check that your pressure regulator is installed properly. Particles in the water can be a sign that your filter is old or clogged and may need to be replaced.



Because many irrigation pipes are underground, it may be difficult to identify loose pipe connections. Between irrigation cycles, look for areas of the landscape with water pooling on the surface, which could indicate an underground leak. Check the valve boxes that house controls and other components underground to make sure that valves are securely connected and can close completely, so they do not slowly seep water even when they are turned off. Installing a flow meter can also help you know when your system has a leak.

Direct Sprinklers for Best Water Coverage

Do your sprinklers spray your driveway, house, or sidewalk? Direct them towards the landscape to avoid sending runoff—and possible pollution—down the storm drain. You (or a professional) should be able to adjust each sprinkler nozzle so the spray is as wide or as narrow as necessary. For best results, the water from one sprinkler head should just reach the sprinkler head next to it, known as head-to-head coverage. Keep sprinkler heads vertical and avoid tilting for best lawn coverage.

For watering flower gardens, shrubs, and trees, consider using microirrigation (also referred to as

Go With a Pro

Once you're done with your initial spruce-up review, flag anything that needs fixing; if you can't do it yourself, find an irrigation professional certified by a WaterSense labeled program to inspect and maintain your system at www.epa.gov/watersense/irrigation-pro. These professionals have demonstrated knowledge of water-saving technologies and techniques, and they can also program your irrigation controller based on your location and landscape to ensure the right amount of water is applied.