

## GROW WITH EXTENSION

# Save water and have a healthier lawn



**Lloyd Singleton**

With warmer weather upon us, folks with automated landscape irrigation systems can adopt irrigation practices that result in the most efficient, cost-effective use of water – and the healthiest landscapes. During the spring and summer, landscape irrigation can make up a large portion of residential water use. During periods of dry weather, turfgrasses may require supplemental water through irrigation to maintain appearance and function. It is important to deliver only the amount of water needed to replace what is used by the turf. This practice promotes efficient use of water resources as well as an ideal environment for turfgrass growth.

Do an irrigation audit. To ensure efficient irrigation, you need to know the amount of water an irrigation system is applying during each cycle. Completing an audit of an irrigation system provides the information needed to set irrigation controllers to deliver the proper amount of water. This is the good kind

of audit, not the scary kind (<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/landscape-irrigation-auditing-made-simple>).

Actively manage your irrigation schedule. During the growing season, your irrigation may not be needed during a week with good rainfall. (<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/water-requirements-of-north-carolina-turfgrasses>). Determine how much is needed and only irrigate as needed. A healthy durable turf that withstands minor drought is achieved by irrigating thoroughly but as infrequently as possible. This may encourage deeper rooting. Wait to water until you observe a symptom of wilting where footprints on the turf stick around for more than one hour. Usually, only a few areas will appear wilted in the same general location of the turf; these areas serve as good indicator spots when assessing the need to water. Delay watering the entire turf area for another day or so by irrigating only the wilted areas if possible.

Get a soil test. We expect our plant clinic services at the N.C. Cooperative Extension New Hanover County Center to be available after Memorial Day, and we can assist you in getting a free soil sample analysis. Knowing your soil type and nutrient availability will help in making good fertilization and irrigation decisions for your landscape.



**An irrigation system's distribution uniformity (DU) can be calculated to determine efficiency.**

[CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]

Water at night or early morning and only on assigned days. The most efficient time of day to water is late evening through early morning. Nighttime is generally less windy, cooler, and more humid than daytime, resulting in less evaporation and a more efficient application of water. Cape Fear Public Utilities Authority and other local utilities recently adopted a water supply emergency plan, with steps to be implemented in case of drought or water-supply disruption. This plan includes an irrigation schedule that can serve as a model

for homeowners: even house numbers (e.g. 1230 Main Street) water on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, odd house numbers (e.g. 1235 Main Street) on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays, and no watering on Mondays.

Automatic sprinklers are wonderful technology, but it's also easy to forget about them and the water they're using because they often run while we're still asleep or just waking up. For additional resources to have a well-managed irrigation system, leave a message for our plant clinic at (910)798-7660

and we'll call you back.

Wars have been fought for the past several decades over oil; wars of the future will be fought over water. Let's each do our part to conserve our water resources and have a healthier, resilient landscape too.

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