

Installing a sprinkler systems ensures efficient watering

BY FRED PERATT

Do you remember the summer we got the exact amount of rain we needed? The year Mother Nature kept an eye on things and we didn't need to water our lawns even once?

The reality is, if you live in the D.C. area and own a home, you probably own a sprinkler, too. While annual precipitation doesn't vary all that much, it usually comes in stops and starts, which means often times, you're the one who has to do the watering. So what's the best way to optimize the amount of water you need to keep your yard looking its best? Surprisingly, a smart water strategy begins before you even turn on the hose.

■ RETAINING WATER

Start by choosing plants native to Loudoun County. These species have evolved over thousands of years to survive the ups and downs specific to our region. For example, Wild geranium, Virginia Bluebell, Foxglove, Woodland Phlox, Rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susans), and Joe-Pye Weed are all accustomed to our mid-Atlantic rainfall and grow heartily in parks, roadsides and backyards.

When you choose plant varieties, be generous. Sparsely populated plantings tend to create rivulets of water during heavy rains, washing away nutrients and damaging plants. On the flip side, when there's little or no rain, disconnected



Josh Hanson of Environmental Enhancements installs an irrigation system at a Loudoun property.

root systems are challenged to capture water and keep the soil moist. Native ferns such as Northern Maidenhair, Ostrich, Cinnamon and Christmas Fern all lend themselves to creating clusters that support water retention.

When you mow, use mulching blades, since grass-clippings help return nutrients to the soil. You also might want to consider mowing your lawn less frequently and setting the mower blades higher. Short grass tends to burn up more easily in the mid-summer sun.

■ WATERING

Your simplest option is to use a hose-end sprinkler and

a timer. Throughout the summer, water three-to-five days per week, depending on rainfall.

Water for 30 minutes in the early morning (ideally before sunrise) or late afternoon to avoid mid-day evaporation. Don't water after dark. Vampires won't get you, but fungus might. Plants are more susceptible to mold and rot when left to soak in the cool of the night. If you have time, cut your sessions in half and water twice a day—15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes in the early evening. Shorter sessions reduce the risk of losing precious topsoil, which can happen if sprinklers are left on too long.

■ THINK SPRINKLER SYSTEMS

Using a sprinkler system is far more efficient than manually watering your own lawn. With a sprinkler system, water is metered and directed where it's needed most, and will adjust accordingly to sunny and shady areas of your property.

Many of the newer sprinkler systems have rain sensors that automatically respond to changes in weather patterns, and some even have an option for controlling your system via your phone. The best news? Sprinkler systems are budget-friendly. Once the initial investment is made, you will realize savings right away.

As a full-service landscaping firm, Environmental Enhancements offers complete irrigation/sprinkler system services. Visit eelandscaping.com or call 703-421-7400.

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