

Programming your Timer

For each timer zone, determine where the valve is located, the type of sprinkler it operates, the plant material it waters and the average sun exposure for the zone. Then it's time for scheduling:

- ◆ **Place lawn in separate programs from other plants.** Lawns typically need more water applied more frequently than other plant types. It's best to schedule lawn zones no more than 4 days per week, and shrub zones only 2-3 days per week.
- ◆ **The recommended watering window is between 9 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.** when the air is cool and calm. Running sprinklers during the daytime can cause a lot of the water to evaporate or be blown away.
- ◆ **Watering run times should vary between zones with different sprinkler types.** This is because different sprinklers apply water at different rates. For example, standard spray sprinklers apply water much faster than rotating sprinklers, so sprays should be run less than half as long as rotating sprinklers. Drip zones typically are run longer but less frequently.
- ◆ Schedule to the current weather by calling the **Lawn Watering Infoline at 541-774-2460**. This will give the approximate **weekly** watering times for different sprinkler types. Keep in mind that Infoline numbers are for lawn in full sun. Shady areas and other plants will need less.

- ◆ Once the current water need for the week has been determined for the zone, **divide the total weekly minutes by the number of watering days**. This will give the number of minutes to run the zone each watering day.
- ◆ **Divide the daily minutes into multiple short cycles**, as mentioned previously. For example, divide the daily watering time by three, and enter the resulting minutes into the run times for the appropriate zone(s). Then, set three start times for the **program**, each spaced only an hour or two apart. This means your sprinklers should come on three separate cycles each watering day to achieve the total **daily** watering time needed.
- ◆ **If rain has been received, use the rain delay feature or temporarily turn the timer to the off position.** Why water your landscape when nature can do it for you?
- ◆ **Read your timer's instruction manual for more detailed operation tips.** If the prior owner of your property didn't leave one, replacement manuals for most models can be found online.



Sprinkler Timer Tips



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Sprinkler Timer Basics

Sprinkler timers are the command center for the entire irrigation system, but often have many features that are misunderstood or not utilized. When the timer is properly set, the landscape health can be enhanced while saving thousands of gallons of water each month. On the other hand, an improperly set timer can result in drowned plants, soggy lawns and large amounts of wasted water.

It is important for property owners to understand how to operate the timer and to realize that the timer is not a “set it and forget it” tool. Rather, watering schedules should be modified throughout the sprinkling season.

Even if a hired gardener does the sprinkler scheduling, property owner knowledge is key to providing guidance, communicating expectations and making changes. Ultimately, it is the property owner who is responsible for the sprinkling schedules, as they pay the water bill and it's their landscape that is impacted.

The Medford Water Commission has several resources available to help operate and maintain landscape sprinkler systems. Call 541-774-2435 or visit www.medfordwater.org for many more sprinkler tips and ideas.

Helpful Sprinkler Timer Features

There are many different models of sprinkler timers, but most have similar features. Read on to learn about these features and how to use them effectively.

- ◆ **Multiple start times:** This provides a simple way to run irrigation cycles more than once each watering day. It is particularly helpful in sloped areas and/or in clay soils (as is the case in much of our local area). **This feature allows the water to be applied in layers**, giving it time to soak in between cycles. As an example, instead of irrigating with a single long cycle, schedule the irrigation to run three consecutive short cycles, with start times beginning at 1:30 a.m., 3:00 a.m. and 4:30 a.m. Total watering time will be about the same, but by breaking it up, water will soak in better with less runoff.

Be aware that with most timers, **a start time applies to the group of zones included in the selected program**, and the zones will run one after the other. People often mistakenly assume that a separate start time needs to be set for each zone. That usually results in sprinkling starting over and over again.



- ◆ **Multiple programs:** Since water needs differ from one part of a landscape to another, most timers provide the ability to run two or more distinct irrigation programs or schedules. These control the **watering days** and **start times** for all zones placed within the program.

For example, include all lawn zones in Program A, running four days per week with three start times per watering day, while placing shrub areas on Program B for two days a week with four start times each watering day. Within Program A, run a sunny lawn zone for six minutes each start time, and a shady lawn zone for four minutes, and not include any watering of these zones in Program B.

- ◆ **Percentage or Seasonal Adjustment:** This feature allows the adjustment of the watering times for all of the sprinkler zones at once with a single button, making frequent adjustments very easy. This enables the increase or decrease of watering times in 10% increments.
- ◆ **Weather based timers:** While still fairly new, this style of sprinkler timer automatically adjusts watering times based on current weather conditions. While these timers provide precise and appropriate scheduling, they require more expertise for initial setup and fine tuning.