

## Smart Start

It's easy to conserve water for your landscaping needs if you choose the right plants and plan ahead.

### Know what, when and where to plant.

- Choose grasses and plants that have low water requirements and thrive in our climate.
- Consider replacing grass with ground cover, perimeter plants, or mulch, and adding shade trees.
- Plant in the spring or fall. Hotter temperatures require more water for plants to become established.
- Group plants together with similar moisture needs to make it easier to prevent overwatering.

### Keep soil healthy.

- Before planting, have your soil tested (for low or no cost, depending on the time of year) by Union County Cooperative Extension (704.283.3801).
- When planting, turn and cultivate the soil and add soil amendments to improve soil moisture infiltration and retention.

### Mulch plants, shrubs and trees.

- Use 2-4 inches of mulch to dramatically decrease evaporation, improve water penetration, and control weeds.



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A close-up photograph of a yellow and black pop-up irrigation sprinkler head in a green lawn. Water is spraying out from the head. A large, semi-transparent green water drop graphic is overlaid on the background.

# Homeowner's Guide to Irrigation Systems

When used correctly, irrigation systems can help create a beautiful and healthy landscape. This guide will help you better understand landscape management strategies and how to use your irrigation system efficiently. These easy changes not only help conserve water, but also save you money on your utility bill.



**UNIONCOUNTY**  
WATER

# Irrigation Systems

A properly installed and maintained automatic irrigation system can be very water efficient.

## Installation

- ◆ **Hire a professional.**  
Even the best irrigation system won't perform well if installed or maintained incorrectly. Find qualified, local irrigation contractors from the NC Irrigation Contractors' Licensing Board ([nciclb.org](http://nciclb.org)).
- ◆ **Work with your contractor.**  
Ask your contractor about all the different smart irrigation products on the market. Have them train you on how the system works.
- ◆ **Match your irrigation system to your landscaping plan.**  
Different plants have different watering needs, and these needs may change over time as the plants grow or the landscape changes.
- ◆ **Consider drip irrigation.**  
A drip irrigation system can dramatically increase water use efficiency, when installed correctly by a licensed irrigation contractor.



## Use & Maintenance

After your irrigation system is installed, it is your responsibility to ensure it is used and maintained properly and efficiently.

- ◆ **Water only when and where needed.**
  - Let the soil dry out between irrigation or rain events.
  - Prevent water loss by watering when the sun is low or down, winds are calm, and temperatures are cool - typically during the very early morning hours before sunrise.
  - Point your sprinklers to water plants, not your driveway, sidewalk, patio, or buildings.
- ◆ **Inspect your system monthly.**
  - Irrigation systems need regular maintenance to keep them working efficiently year after year.
  - Check for leaks, broken or clogged sprinkler heads, and other problems.
  - Clean clogged screens and microirrigation filters as needed.
- ◆ **Make ongoing adjustments as needed.**
  - Remove or correct obstructions that prevent sprinklers from distributing water evenly.
  - Adjust sprinkler head positions and spray patterns to ensure water is going where you want it to go.
  - Check the pressure, which can change over time and negatively affect system efficiency.
- ◆ **Winterize.**
  - Even with Union County's moderate climate, protect your investment by winterizing your system annually before the first freeze of the season. Blow out water that could freeze and crack backflow prevention devices, pipes, valves and sprinklers, or hire a licensed irrigation contractor to provide this service.

## Compliance

- ◆ **Irrigation Frequency.** Union County Water practices water conservation year-round, regardless of rainfall conditions or drought status. Customers are required to limit their irrigation frequency to a set schedule based on their home address, and to follow the County's guidelines for tighter restrictions during a time of drought.  
For more information: [unionconserves.com](http://unionconserves.com)
- ◆ **Backflow Prevention Device.** Per Union County's Cross Connection Ordinance, residential irrigation systems are required to have a backflow prevention device, which helps protect the public water supply from contamination. Customers are responsible for the cost, installation, maintenance, and testing of their backflow prevention device. Residential customers must have their devices inspected every other year.  
For more information: [unioncountync.gov/crossconnection](http://unioncountync.gov/crossconnection)