

# Irrigation system full of checks and balances to ensure proper watering

Everyone is familiar with the phrase “feast or famine.” When it comes to landscaping, that phrase easily could be applied to going from the rainy season, when we have plenty of water for our plants, to the dry season, when we have too little.

As a result of too little rain, we must increase the irrigation run times as well as the frequency of irrigation or face damage to landscape plants and the potential browning of turf.

The dry season definitely lets us know if there is poor irrigation coverage because of a clogged nozzle, a head blocked by a plant, a broken or missing irrigation part, or maybe even an entire zone that does not come on with the clock.

When managing the landscape areas within the districts, we can also use the dry times to judge how well a particular maintenance contractor is monitoring and correcting problems with irrigation coverage.

For instance, if I am driving down one of our divided median roads and the turf on one side is green for half a mile, and then there is a spot where the next 300 feet of turf is turning brown, followed by another half mile of green, it is a safe bet there is a problem with an entire zone not functioning properly.

These issues can be caused by anything from a lightning strike to the area, which may have burned a zone wire or solenoid on an irrigation valve, to a loose wire in a controller or a bad connection at a wire splice somewhere underground.

No matter what the cause



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is, our maintenance contractor is responsible for noticing the problem and correcting it.

There is language in the landscape maintenance contracts that specifies a monthly irrigation check of all clocks, areas and zones. This allows the contractor to catch and correct many problems to the system. That is why you will regularly see our contractor employees out turning on zones and checking and adjusting irrigation heads for coverage throughout areas of The Villages.

Some of these areas, such as cul-de-sacs, have small battery-operated controllers that have to be checked one at a time by turning on each zone with a hand-held programmer.

In the case of many villa units, there is a larger wall-mounted clock that has the ability to run a short test program that runs each zone for a couple of minutes; this allows the individual checking the irrigation to walk with colored flags and mark problem areas to address after the test cycle is completed.

On many of our more recent larger areas of landscape, you may notice portions that are identified by a sign that states “Smart Irrigation at Work.” What this really means is the irrigation system for that area is controlled by a computer that is able to utilize localized weather

station information to increase or decrease zone run times based on rain amounts or evapotranspiration.

This function provides the landscape areas with the appropriate amount of irrigation needed instead of irrigating for a fixed number of minutes on each run cycle, which could waste water.

The system also measures flow through a sensor in the irrigation line and can tell when there is a break in the system. If a break occurs, the system will turn off that zone and send an alarm to the person monitoring the system followed by an email or text to the contractor who is responsible for the irrigation. This ensures that a particular zone gets repaired before the next scheduled run time.

The advantages of this system are huge, because it can be monitored by the person in charge of running the irrigation from anywhere there is computer service.

We still require the contractor who is responsible for the landscape maintenance to do a monthly irrigation check on each zone for their controllers utilizing a hand-held remote, and they must schedule these checks in advance so the person monitoring the system can turn on the master valve to provide adequate water pressure.

The individual monitoring the system can then let us know whether the contractor actually ran each controller long enough to have done the comprehensive check of each zone. Most of our contractors are now fully on board with this process, so it is going

much more smoothly and results in significant water savings.

We are still experiencing much warmer than normal temperatures for this time of the year. Let's hope we start getting a gradual cool-down soon instead of a sudden cold front with a frost before all

of our plants and turf get the message to stop growing and have a chance to harden off for the winter.

The weather folks say we are in a strong El Nino cycle this year, which means we

can expect a wetter than normal winter. We need more water in many of our areas, so let's hope they are right this time! Feast or famine? We will see, and I will see you next time, here at Our Place.

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