

Setting Lawn Sprinklers for Your High Desert Lawn

Which is a primary cause of inefficient lawn irrigation?

- a. poorly aimed sprinkler heads
- b. inappropriate watering schedule
- c. inappropriate watering periods
- d. poorly prepared soil
- e. all of the above

As residents and the town of Hailey look to develop a more sustainable environment within our high desert valley, the use of water for lawn irrigation is an important issue to be considered. Our low annual rainfall and hot, windy summers make water-efficient irrigation an ecological necessity as well as also being financially sound. A well designed and maintained irrigation or sprinkling system can result in significant savings in both areas.

Whether you have an automated irrigation system or move a sprinkler around your lawn, the first step is to make sure that every gallon of water you pull from the system actually reaches your grass. **Check to make sure that your sprinkler isn't spraying the sides of your house, a fence, or pavement.** Adjust your sprinkler so that the spray falls a bit short of the yard border and the moisture will migrate out through the soil. Water sprayed on a nonporous surface is lost to evaporation and does your lawn no good.

The evaporation of your irrigation water is also effected heavily by the time of day that you water. As water is sprayed into the air, a part of it will always evaporate but the amount of this lost water is greatest when temperatures are highest. Hailey has developed an ordinance in response to this fact in requiring residents to **water only during the cooler parts of the day, only after 5 p.m. and before 10 a.m.** This watering period also has the advantage of tending towards the times of day that are the least windy and so less water is blown away from your lawn.

Another important consideration is how often and how long to water your lawn. Everyone's sprinkling system and yard is different and it will be necessary for you to monitor your own system to develop your most efficient schedule. **It is better to water deeply every 2-6 days than to sprinkle lightly everyday.** When the soil is watered properly, you may notice that the top skin of soil looks dry the next day but the moisture held deeply in the soil (near the grass roots) will remain for quite a bit longer. A good soak is usually about a half an inch at a time. To make sure your sprinkler is delivering that amount to ground level, mark straight-sided cans (tuna cans are good) at half an inch on the inside wall. Place the cans around your yard when you sprinkle and check them as soon as possible afterwards. Increase or decrease the period of sprinkling until you get your measurement of 1/2 inch.

Reducing the frequency of your watering may be the most difficult part for most people. As you work to increase the span between your half-inch soakings, you may check your soil moisture by digging a spade straight down into your soil and taking a look at the

moisture line you will find there. If your lawn's roots are still in the moist area it will do fine. If it looks like the greatest part of root is in dry soil, it's time to water again. Check a few places throughout the yard to make sure you didn't get an unusual reading in one area and check at different times during the year as you don't need to water as frequently in the cooler spring and fall months as during the heat of summer.

For information on how to pick the best grass for your lawn and how to maintain the best soil for your lawn, look further on this website. Also, keep an eye out for each Our Earth newsletter for more ideas on reducing your water needs.

Answer to the quiz question (E - of course)