

Easy checks to keep irrigation system running

Garden sprinklers are the invisible, underappreciated stars of the yard. Most people don't really notice them until they stop working and their plants get dry and stressed or their water bill spikes because of a leak.

Most systems are turned off during winter rains. Then in the summer, a switch is flipped on the irrigation controller, and the system is expected to work flawlessly. However, that's not always the case.

Here you will find a list of things to check beyond simply making sure the switch is on:

■ **Grass around heads:** Make sure grass and other plants haven't grown over or blocked the sprinkler nozzles.

■ **Clogged nozzles:** Even a small blade of grass can clog your sprinkler nozzles. Make sure they are clean and spraying properly and that filters are installed.

■ **Bent or crooked heads:** If a head is leaning to one side, it can cut down on its spraying distance by many feet. Straighten as needed.

■ **Leaking valves:** You'll usually see water trickling out of your sprinkler heads, but listen at the valve for a hissing sound to detect a leak.

■ **Proper "station duration" and "days" settings:** I stopped at a client's house the other day and found the controller set to the "on" position

every day for 10 minutes. During the winter, there was a power failure and the backup battery was dead, so the clock went into default mode. The clock unwittingly reset to seven days per week. Make sure your clock is properly programmed for your plants and sun exposure. Also make sure each valve station is watering and the backup battery is charged.

■ **Drip filter:** A lot of people don't even know they have one. It's usually

in the line after the valve. Unscrew the housing, remove the filter and rinse it out with a hose or replace it.

■ **Drip emitters:** Painstaking as it is, each emitter should be checked for clogs and the plastic lines checked for cracks. Also make sure drip tub-

ing to the plants hasn't been kicked away from the base of the plant by animals or gardeners. Check, too, that lines haven't been cut by garden shears or string trimmers. Sometimes, animals will chew on the emitters for water, so check for teeth marks, as well.

■ **Impact and rotor sprinklers:** These can come out of adjustment, so if it's supposed to be a 180-degree half spray, make sure it's not over- or under-spraying.

■ **Spray nozzles:** Make sure they are adjusted properly so they don't spray the house or under-

spray your plants. Also make sure to use the right nozzle for the area.

■ *Licensed landscaper and Santa Cruz County resident Bruce Nash is the owner of Sprinkler Solutions. He has more than 20 years' experience in irrigation repair and installation. He can be reached at 408-921-1543.*



Bruce Nash
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