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Spring Is Here – Check Your Sprinklers & Timers

Tips from Neighbors InDeed

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Yes, we could still get some significant rain. After all, “April showers” are proverbial. But now is the time to make sure all functions in your yard irrigation system are up and running. That way, when our dry season arrives, you’ll be all set.

Neighbors InDeed’s Handy Helpers have already taken more than a dozen calls from residents asking for a quick check of their timers, valves, sprinklers, and drippers. Are you next? Give us a call at 223-2763. But in case you would like the satisfaction of handling all this on your own, here’s a primer:

TIMERS

The heart and soul of your yard irrigation is the timer – installed on a wall inside your garage – with a number of functions, some of which can be a bit baffling. Most houses in Lincoln Hills are equipped with either Rain Bird or Hunter sprinkler timers, and each has its own little idiosyncrasies. But they both share the following features:

TIME & DATE SET. Make sure the timer is set to the current hour, minute, AM/PM, and day of the week.

WATERING START TIME. Timers allow you to set 2-3 start times. For lawns, Neighbors InDeed and Green Acres recommend two start times in the hot, dry months (June, July, August), both in the morning, about one or two hours apart. This helps to prevent water run-off and makes for more efficient use of water. Otherwise, shrubs and trees on drippers only need one start time.

STATION RUN TIMES. Most of us are tempted to use far more water than is necessary, so be conservative in the amount of time your system is on.

WATERING DAYS. There’s no need to run your water every day, even in hot spells. We’ve found that three days a week is sufficient for most lawns and plants.

You're now be ready to put the dial onto "automatic." If you run into problems, or need help, call Neighbors InDeed!

VALVES

Each of your watering stations is controlled by a solenoid valve at the side of your house. These valves have a limited life span, especially if they are left uncovered with the hot summer sun inflicting wear. If you see a valve dripping, it should be replaced. If you're a somewhat better than average home putterer, you can do it yourself, but it takes a bit of patience. Go to Home Depot or Lowe's and ask a plumbing specialist about hardware to purchase and tips on installation. If what they say sounds like more than what you want to take on, then purchase the part(s), and ask a Handy Helper do this for you.

If you do the replacement yourself, be sure to turn off the main shut-off valve, found in-ground beside your solenoid control valves.

SPRINKLER HEADS AND DRIPPERS

Over the winter months it's possible that some sprinkler heads and drippers may have been damaged, clogged, gone out of alignment, or otherwise not fully functioning. How can you tell? For sprinkler heads, usually, a visual check will do. Turn on your water and do a walk-around. If you see any heads that aren't working to your satisfaction, make adjustments as needed. If replacements are needed, you should turn the water off first to avoid an unwanted face full of cold water!

Some drippers can be spotted visually. Others are buried under bark or soil, and it's hard to determine how well they are working. The "finger" test may be sufficient. Turn on the water and let it run about 10 minutes. Then, with an ungloved hand, work your index finger into the soil near a plant. If the soil is moderately wet, that's good. If it's soaking wet, or if it's dry, that's not good – there may be a popped dripper that needs re-attaching or a clogged dripper that needs replacing.

In this last category, Neighbors InDeed's Handy Helpers can troubleshoot A FEW sprinklers or drippers ONLY, so if you need your whole system inspected, call a qualified lawn/garden specialist. We maintain a list of recommended services – just call us at 223-2763. Happy gardening!