

## Don't sprinkle, soak thriftily

Morris and James Carey • August 2, 2008

- 
- 
- [Print this page](#)
- [E-mail this article](#)

Here's how: You can convert a sprinkler head into a nifty new drip-irrigation system that will save **wear and tear on tender young plants and lower your monthly water bill**. A drip-irrigation system is a conservation measure that will improve the quality of the landscape, too.

Replace the regular sprinkler head with a low-cost, drip-watering emitter (water-distribution device). Then plug one end of a piece of drip tubing into the emitter head, and run the drip tube along the base of your plants, securing the other end with a rock or small stake. Turn it on. Instead of a flow, you'll see only a tiny drip that will be gentle on both blooms and plants.

When most of us think of outdoor watering, we think of a hose with a sprinkler on the end or a sprinkler system. We think of covering lawn and garden with an ample spray of tap water.

Unfortunately, spray watering can be extremely wasteful. An average landscape can consume more **water in a day than a family of four needs in a month**. And this type of watering is not effective for many kinds of plant growth. Lawns, trees, shrubs and flowers all have different needs.

What's worse, conventional sprinklers that irrigate planting strips bordering a home can be the origin of a host of **water-related problems ranging from mold and mildew to peeling paint and even a shifting foundation**. The latter is particularly serious, since it can result in out-of-level floors, difficult-to-open windows and doors, and cracks in walls, ceilings and even the foundation itself.

So, save water and your foundation by converting the sprinkler system bordering the home to a drip-irrigation or drip-watering system.

Dripwatering systems have long been around, but not until recently have they become readily available and priced to sell.

Better manufacturers offer accurate water-pressure regulators, high-quality filters, automatic inline **fertilizing devices, a broad selection of water emitters and connectors, solid and perforated tubing and a variety of watering heads and flow reducers**. Prices may range from \$10 for a basic starter kit to \$75 for a more complex system that may include tubing, emitters, stakes, watering heads and flow reducers.

With the right parts you can control water use to within amazingly accurate tolerances and fertilize at the same time without even being there. And a great advantage of drip systems is that they don't have to be placed deep underground, so installation is easy.

It isn't necessary, but if you can afford to include it in your budget, the place to start is with an electric timer. Most yards can be controlled with a six-station unit that can be purchased on sale for less than \$40. Timers operate on 110 volts, but use a very small amount of electricity. Secondary wires from the timer are low-voltage and run from the timer to electrically controlled sprinkler valves. In-line timers are also available for single line systems.

In planning a drip system, a water-pressure regulator is a must and should be installed in the water line between the water supply and the control valves. Good drip systems rely on constant, well-regulated water pressure. Proper pressure ensures that the emitters will supply the desired amount of water through each water-supply tube.

After the control valve, the next item in line is the emitter, to regulate water flow and act as a distribution center for the drip tubing. Emitters are available in a wide variety of gallons-per-hour flow, anywhere from one to 20 gallons. A one-gallon-per-hour emitter will supply one quart of water in 15 minutes with very little waste.

Emitters are also available in several different distribution configurations. Some will supply a single tube only. Others have two, four and even 12 outlets. That brings up two questions: What do you do if you need only three drip lines and you want to purchase just one emitter?

If you need three lines, buy a four-port emitter and one-port plug. Port plugs are removable so that tubes can be added or subtracted as the landscape is altered.

**More home improvement tips and information are available on the Web at [www.onthehouse.com](http://www.onthehouse.com) or by calling (800) 737-2474, ext. 59.**

---