



## It's Time to Change That Sprinkler Setting

By Julie Saare-Edmonds

As the days become cooler in fall, the water needs of plants decrease. Unfortunately, many people forget to adjust their irrigation timers with the changing of the seasons and still water at the summer peak levels. For most of California, July is the month with the highest water demand. For example, nearly 9 inches of water is needed for the month of July by landscape plants growing in desert communities. Most of California has a landscape evapotranspiration rate ( $ET_L$  — the amount of water lost from the soil and plants, measured in inches) between 7 and 9 inches for the month of July. By October, that level has dropped to between 2 and 3 inches and in November the demand has dropped below 2 inches. In many places rainfall is enough to satisfy most, if not all, water requirements through the winter. If you live in an area where rainfall is somewhat plentiful, turn your controller off during the months of December, January, and February. If it doesn't rain for a few weeks, turn your controller back on for one or two cycles.

Another way to look at adjusting the controller for the change of seasons is considering the percentage of time the cycle is running. Using July as the peak month at 100 percent, gradually decrease the amount of time the cycle lasts by a few percent each month after July, so that by October you are watering 50 percent or half the time that you watered in July. By December that amount could drop to zero. In the spring the controller would need to be adjusted upward slowly in the same manner starting in April for most areas. Some controllers come with a water budget feature where the amount of time would decrease or increase in 1 percent to 10 percent increments by pressing a button. If your controller is not capable of

adjusting by percent, simply reprogram the amount of time each cycle runs. For example, if your lawn sprinklers run for 50 minutes twice a week in July, decrease the September run time to 35 minutes, the October run time to 25 minutes and by November, 10 minutes twice a week will usually be adequate. Depending on where you live, the actual run times will vary with

sprinkler output, climate, soil type, sun exposure and plant types.

Once you have established how much water your landscaping really needs during the peak summer demand, without overwatering or creating runoff, scaling back on watering time when water is not needed as much will go a long way toward improving water use efficiency.

### Water Use Efficiency Help on the Web

*Check these Web sites for useful information about water use efficiency.*

#### **The Department of Water Resources' Division of Planning and Local Assistance**

**[www.dpla.water.ca.gov](http://www.dpla.water.ca.gov)**

This is a good place to start when looking for assistance.

#### **The California Integrated Waste Management Board**

**[www.ciwmb.ca.gov](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov)**

For landscape and water resource conservation, choose the Organic Materials program.

There you will find links to home gardening and commercial landscaping well as articles on xeriscaping, grass cycling and composting.

#### **The Energy Commission**

**[www.consumerenergycenter.org](http://www.consumerenergycenter.org)**

**"Flex Your Power"**

**[www.flexyourpower.ca.gov](http://www.flexyourpower.ca.gov)**

Both Web sites will give you information on water and energy, and feature a listing of rebates and other incentive programs.

#### **The Bureau of Reclamation**

**<http://watershare.mp.usbr.gov>**

#### **The United States Environmental Protection Agency**

**[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)**

A search of these two sites will also lead to a listing of some demonstration gardens, educational materials, a landscape planner, lists of native plants and web activities for kids.

#### **The United States Department of Agriculture**

**[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)**

This site has a home gardening section that features conservation advice, information on fruit and nut production.

*Here are a few other sites that may offer something of value to you.*

#### **American Water Works Association and the Bureau of Reclamation (joint site)**

**[www.waterwiser.org](http://www.waterwiser.org)**

#### **California Urban Water Conservation Council**

**[www.cuwcc.org](http://www.cuwcc.org)**

#### **University of California Cooperative Extension Office**

**<http://danr.ucop.edu/regional.htm>**

#### **Master Gardeners**

**[www.mastergardeners.org](http://www.mastergardeners.org)**

