

## Irrigation Audit and Water Dog Workshop

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Lawns need about one inch of water per week. During the hottest part of summer, they may need one and a half inches. Do you know how much water your irrigation system applies? Too little and turfgrass is stressed. Too much and turfgrass is stressed along with water wasted.

Lawns require uniform watering so one area is not underwatered while another is overwatered. Do you know if your system waters uniformly?

Have you recently observed your system running for inefficiencies or broken heads? Maybe a plant has grown large enough to interfere with a nozzle or some heads are hitting pavement instead of turf.

Lawns are best watered deeply but infrequently. Do you know what this means and if your watering program meets this? Watering shallowly encourages shallow roots while watering too deep wastes water.

A fairly simple way to answer these questions is to conduct a simple irrigation audit and use a soil moisture meter or a household screwdriver to check soil moisture.

To demonstrate how to do this and to learn about correct irrigation of turf, a Water Dogs workshop will be held June 13, 6:30 pm at 4714 31st street in Columbus, the home of Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Marge Prokupek.

In 2021, 24 EMGs piloted our water dogs program aimed at conserving water in home landscapes. An irrigation audit was conducted on each of their systems. During the growing season, they used a soil moisture meter or screwdriver to determine when to irrigate, otherwise their automatic systems were turned off.

Almost all of the volunteers felt they had reduced the number of times they irrigated despite that year's heat and drought. One commented they only irrigated 7 times compared to past years when their system ran about three times a week. Going forward, the majority planned to keep their systems turned off until soil moisture was needed.

Extension Master Gardeners are now hosting workshops at their homes to help others learn about efficient irrigation for healthier turf and water conservation. We hope you can join us on June 13 for Columbus' Water Dog workshop.

At the workshop, Prokupek and other Master Gardeners will share their experiences with the program. We will talk about how much water turfgrass needs and how to determine when to water, along with sharing ways to conserve water in the landscape.

A demonstration of an irrigation audit will be done along with using a soil moisture meter and screw driver to check soil moisture. Soil compaction will be checked with a soil penetrometer.

To conduct an irrigation system audit, we talk about needing 20 tuna cans. It can take a while to collect enough cans. I have kits available at the Extension office to check out. They contain tuna cans or plastic catch cups used by professionals and a fact sheet on how to conduct an audit. Workshop participants in the Columbus area will be able to check these out.

After doing an audit, you'll have increased awareness of how much water your irrigation system applies and how uniformly. You can also watch for inefficiencies and broken parts. Irrigation systems usually run early in the morning when we cannot make such observations.

For more information on turf irrigation efficiency, see the water wise fact sheets and other resources at: <https://go.unl.edu/turfwaterdogs>. And join us on June 13 for the Water Dog workshop.