Efficient Irrigation

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After 5 years of drought we have had a rainy half year that filled up the Edwards Aquifer (and even surface reservoirs like Medina Lake). The Edwards Aquifer is a wonderful resource. Unfortunately it can drop to low levels nearly as easy as it fills up.

Landscape watering is a non-essential use when compared to uses such as drinking water, fire protection, manufacturing, sanitation, agriculture, and even environmental water needs. Those of us who use water for landscape irrigation have a special responsibility to use the water efficiently, without waste.

Take some time now that restrictions are lifted to assess your landscape water use towards making it more efficient. Here are some issues to consider.

1. Check your irrigation system for leaks and have them repaired. If you suspect you have leaks but are not sure where they are located, call in your irrigation contractor or a SAWS technician to check out the system. Visit the SAWS website to learn more about the free services they offer.
2. As part of the irrigation contractor visit have them adjust or replace sprinkler heads to prevent applying water to sidewalks or streets. They will also adjust the application pattern to eliminate areas that are not receiving adequate water and areas that are receiving too much.
3. Also review your landscape watering situation to identify areas that would be better irrigated with drip irrigation rather than sprinkler irrigation. Vegetable gardens, flowers, shrubs, perennials, and newly planted trees all fit in that category. You can do the conversions yourself or enlist the services of your irrigation contractor.
4. As much as possible operate your drip and/or sprinkler system in manual mode rather than automatic. Turn the irrigation system on when the plants need water and leave it off when there is adequate soil moisture.
5. If your rain sensors are more than two years old, replace them. They are inexpensive. Your irrigation contractor will put in the replacements on the same visit where they check-out your system for leaks and they review with you how to run the system manually.
6. Identify portions of your landscape that will not receive supplemental irrigation. Established well-adapted trees and shrubs should be able to handle summer dry spells. If you have zoysia, Bermuda or buffalo grass, they can be allowed to go dormant. They will green-up quickly when the rains resume.

It is great that the aquifer is full again, let’s do what we can to keep it that way.