**Weekly Express-News Article**

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**Irrigation Maintenance**

For awhile this fall and winter it looked like the drought was going to continue for a second year. We have had good rains in December, January, and February so have some reason to be optimistic. Don’t overdo your optimism however, remember with the aquifer at 664 feet it will only take a dry May or June to start the spiral down again. I think it will continue to rain, however, but whether it does or not, we need to be efficient water users.

The potential for waste is especially high with an irrigation system. If you have one, please consider the following recommendations.

* Have your irrigation contractor come and check out the system now before you need to use it. They will undoubtedly find leaks, broken heads, and other problems that need to be corrected.
* Have the irrigation contractor check out your rain sensor and replace it if it is malfunctioning or over 2 years old.
* Review the operation of the controller with your contractor so you can change the times and frequency of operation as needed as the season progresses.
* Consider changing the heads that spray into flower beds and shrub borders to drip irrigation. Drip irrigation is better for your plants and considerably more efficient. If you are a SAWS customer your can probably get a rebate for converting sprinkler heads to drip irrigation. Visit “[www.saws.org](http://www.saws.org)” and visit Conservation to review all the incentives that are available.
* Run your irrigation system on manual as much as you can. It is particularly important now because the lawn does not need irrigation very much through the spring until June.
* Signup to receive the e-newsletter from SAWS. It is free and tells you how much water your lawn needs based on the weather we had in the last week. You do not need to be a SAWS customer to receive the e-newsletter. Again, go to the Conservation portion of SAWS website at “[www.saws.org](http://www.saws.org)”.
* Need additional help? SAWS customers can call 704-SAVE (7283) to schedule a free home and irrigation check-up.

If the drought, drought restrictions, and a water-hungry landscape has made you think you may want to convert your turf grass to a xeriscape landscape you may be able to receive a rebate from SAWS to make the conversion.

The job can be relatively easy if you plan it well. Attend one of the landscape design classes offered by the Gardening Volunteers of South Texas or use one of many publications available on xeriscape landscapes to produce your ultimate plan. Kill the remaining lawn grass with Round-Up or a similar product and then apply 4 to 6 inches of chopped brush mulch over the entire area. The mulch looks neat and allows you to plant the shrubs, groundcovers, and perennials as your budget, rainfall, and time allows.

Attacking the project in this four-step method; produce a plan; kill weeds and grass, cover with mulch, and then plant at your leisure also allows you to time your planting with forecast rainfall. If we do fall into another drought year, just postpone the planting.

As you might expect the four-step method qualifies you for a SAWS rebate. Again check it out at “[www.saws.org](http://www.saws.org)” and go to Conservation.