

Sprinklers – May 2009

The hot weather is here and you turn your sprinklers on for the time recommended and still have spots that are brown and look like they need more water. Well... they probably do. The problem most of the time is the spots are not getting enough coverage by something that is blocking the water from getting to the area, the sprinkler head flow adjustment is not right or the area the head covers is either misadjusted or has the wrong nozzle on it. Most of us did not get the right amount of sprinklers installed by the builder. Shocking, eh?

If you suspect uneven coverage and several parts of your lawn tend to be dry and brown try a simple test to be sure your sprinkler system is to blame. Place half a dozen containers, such as tuna cans, throughout the affected area and run your system. Note the depth of water collected in each can and calculate an average depth. Perform the same test in areas that seem to receive adequate water (preferably at the same time of day to avoid variations due to fluctuations in water pressure), and make your comparison. If one area is receiving 3/4 inch of water in an hour and another is only getting 1/4 inch, make adjustments. Heads should be placed so each area of the lawn is watered by at least two heads. This is called head-to-head coverage. This means if the head has a radius of 15', the next head should be no more than 15' away. A little closer is better to allow for adjustments. You can reduce the throw distance by up to 25% on most heads. If you closely watch a sprinkler head delivering water, you will notice that the area near the head does not get quite as much water as further out within the last half of its arc. That's why you need another sprinkler head to get that area watered. If your sprinkler head is close to the mailbox post, a tree or a bush you may see a brown spot behind the object because the water is blocked, almost like a light with its shadow. Options are to move the object, move the sprinkler head or add another head. Sometimes it is as simple as trimming a few branches on your tree or shrub. Heads also get buried and/or get run over by your car or one of the big lawn mowers and ultimately getting pushed down. Dave Cutts and I found one of his heads that hadn't been working for a long time. His lawn by the driveway was not getting enough water so we poked around and found a head compacted in the dirt in the corner by the curb. We dug it free and it solved his problem. It may also be as simple as not having the zones on for a long enough period.

Drawing a sketch of where your heads are, or are supposed to be would help if you thought one was stuck down and wanted to locate it sometime in the future. Our trees are getting bigger now and with all the watering we do, the roots stay near the top and rob the grass of water. These areas may need a longer on cycle to stay green. Make sure your heads are adjusted so the sweep (back and forth) reaches to the end of the area you want watered and no further. If it doesn't reach the part of the lawn you are trying to water it will brown up in hot dry weather. On the other hand you do not want to go past the area either. If the head is adjusted so it goes out to the street or driveway for two seconds and then on the return over on your neighbor's property for two seconds you will have lost four seconds of watering for each sweep. Also, the time the head is watering the grass area you want it to reach will be short changed. If you have an area timed for 20 minutes and it takes a head 34 seconds to make a sweep you will get 35 sweeps, but if each sweep was adjusted correctly (shortened on each side by two seconds) you would be getting a little more than 40 sweeps or 12% more water.

Run the irrigation system early in the morning, this is when water pressure is typically at its best, and it is also best for the lawn. If you water in the evening the blades of grass will stay wet much longer and make it easier for fungus to grow. Early morning also has the least wind. Wind can easily blow a spray pattern several feet off target resulting in dry areas. If your sprinkler head flow is adjusted down too far and making a mist instead of a series of streams, even a slight wind will have an effect on where the water goes. I know from experience that if I get my car washed, on the way home the wind will blow the water from the lake fountains on my car as I enter the Fairways each and every time.

If you have to close down a lot on the flow screw and your stream is more like a mist, you may have the wrong nozzle in the head. Stationary (non-revolving) pop up heads should not be on the same zone as revolving heads.

Get more info at - <http://www.toro.com/sprinklers/index.html> <http://www.rainbird.com/Store.htm>
<http://www.hunterindustries.com/>

This and previous around the house articles can be retrieved on the web at <http://www.aaazz.net/id5.html>