



Get your irrigation start-up ready to go

It's that time of year again. As we bid farewell to gray winter days, plants are blooming and parks and fields are greening up. That also means it's time for spring irrigation system start-ups. You want to make sure everything is in good working order before the season gets underway. A thorough start-up can help identify any issues with your irrigation system that could ultimately impede performance or system efficiency.

You'll want to methodically inspect the physical condition of system components as you proceed. As always, check the health of the plant material as well, and adjust accordingly as you go.

Here, then, is a detailed checklist to get you started.

- First, close the valve on the outgoing side of the backflow device. Before turning on any water to the system, all manual drain valves are returned to the "closed" position.

- Close all test connectors on the backflow device.

- Make sure the valve on the inlet side of the backflow is completely open.

- Partially open the water supply valve (system main water valve) slowly and allow the pipes to fill with water gradually. If these valves are opened too quickly, the sprinkler main lines can have high surge pressures, uncontrolled flow and water hammer.

- Once the water has filled the pipe, open the supply valve completely.

- Partially open the valve on the outgoing side of the backflow.

- Walk around your property and shut off any zone valves that had been left open during the winter blow-out process.

- Open the last zone valve on your system, either from the controller or by using the manual bleed at the valve.

- Once water starts spraying out of your last zone, completely open the valve on the backflow.

- Once all the air has been pushed out of your system, shut off your zone valve.

- Turn on each zone, one at a time, and evaluate how your sprinklers are working. Walk through each station on the controller, checking for proper operation of each zone valve. Check for proper operating pressure (low pressure indicates a line break or missing sprinkler), proper rotation and adjustment of sprinkler heads, and adequate coverage.

- Adjust or replace the sprinklers as needed. Check and clean filters on poorly performing sprinklers. Adjust heads to grade as necessary.

- Install a new battery in your controller (wrap masking tape around the battery and write the date on the tape).

- Finally, reprogram your controller for automatic watering. Uncover and clean the system rain sensor, if applicable. Also, finish and clean any in-line filters for drip irrigation zones.

That should get your system underway, and ready to work at peak performance. ■

Hunter Industries, www.hunterindustries.com San Marcos, CA provided this checklist.