

Landscape workshops on smart, automated weather station irrigation offered

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COLLEGE STATION – The Texas A&M School of Irrigation will be conducting a one day short course dedicated to smart irrigation controller use and operation July 13 in College Station, said Charles Swanson, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service program specialist.

“Attendees will learn the basics of irrigation scheduling and how smart controllers and sensors determine watering needs,” he said. “An added benefit of the course is that attendees will gain hands-on practice learning how to program some of the common smart controllers on the market.

“We have been evaluating smart controllers in our lab on campus for over eight years. From our experience, no two controllers are alike in their setup or operation. Highlights of controller performance from our evaluation program will be included in the course to help users determine which controller best fits their needs.”

Cost is \$165 and eight Texas Commission on Environmental Quality continuing education credits for state irrigation licenses will be offered. Registration is available on the AgriLife Extension Conference Services website at <http://agriliferegister.tamu.edu>.

Another short course will be offered on July 14 in College Station on Automated Weather Stations for Irrigation.

“This course is for irrigation professionals or landscape managers looking to maximize their irrigation scheduling management through the use of onsite weather stations,” Swanson said. “Additionally, water utilities and state agencies can learn how to set up their own weather networks to provide watering recommendations to their clientele through programs like WaterMyYard (<http://WaterMyYard.org>) or the TexasET Network (<http://TexasET.tamu.edu>). Attendees will learn about weather sensor selection and operation. Attendees will also gain hands-on practice building and programming an ET weather station.”

Cost is \$165 and eight TCEQ continuing education units will be available for landscape irrigation licenses. Swanson said July is typically the beginning of the hot and dry season for many areas of the state, which means an increased reliance on landscape irrigation systems to maintain quality landscapes.

“As we begin to experience the peak watering needs for our plants, we need to be smart about how much water we use and how we apply it. If you haven’t already, now is the time to make sure your irrigation system is in proper working condition.”

Many homeowners and landscape managers can evaluate their system by going through a simple checklist:

- Turn on each zone on the controller and check to make sure all sprinklers are popping up and applying water within the landscape. Over time sprinklers can become worn or damaged and need repair or replacement. Common problems seen are broken sprinkler heads, clogged nozzles and sprinklers out of alignment that may be spraying streets or sidewalks. Check to make sure there aren’t any obvious pipe leaks on the system.
- Check irrigation controller settings. It is important to be sure the controller is programmed properly. Verify the time and date are correct. Many cities and utilities operate under water restrictions and to avoid any citations make sure to water only on days and at times allowed. Also, check sprinkler runtimes. Excessive runtimes can result in

runoff and water waste. If longer runtimes are needed, program multiple shorter runtimes by adding additional start times per day to the controller. This is often referred to as cycle and soak, which can allow for deeper watering and minimized runoff.

Determining how much water a landscape needs and proper irrigation runtimes can be challenging for the untrained homeowner or manager. Some utility companies in Texas provide weekly watering recommendations through programs like WaterMyYard.

Smart irrigation controllers use weather data and/or onsite sensors to determine when to irrigate and how much to apply.

“Smart controllers have shown promising results to reduce water usage and promote conservation when programmed correctly. However, many end users do not know which smart controller they need or how to program it correctly.”

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