

# Lush landscape requires water management

**E**rosion problems related to standing water, the health of your yard or landscape, and water conservation are the main considerations for contacting an irrigation specialist, a landscaper, or both.

According to Ben Doss, owner of B & C Irrigation Systems and landscaping specialist Sharon Heinz of Signature Landscapes, the usual suspects for drainage problems are air conditioners and downspouts. Water dripping from your air conditioner, off your gutters, or leaking from cracked pipes causes muddy spots. Around your walkways, it tracks into your house. During the summer, it is a breeding ground for mold and mildew, and attracts mosquitoes and other bugs. It also erodes the soil and mulch from around your foundation and makes gardening impossible.

"There are a couple of ways to correct a standing water problem," Doss explains. "We can lay pipe underground leading away from the area to keep it drained; or in some cases, a French drain may be the better choice." A French drain is created from perforated pipe leading away from the swampy area, laid in a trench or a ditch lined with rocks or gravel and surrounding it by landscaping textile to prevent plant roots and debris from clogging the system. French drains can also serve to redirect water away from a septic tank.

"A hard downpour can cause water to overflow your gutters and gush out your downspout," Heinz says. "By using a pop-up drainage emitter, water flows freely from the pipe and away from structural foundations." Many builders leave the downspout exposed, but adding a sleeve to the bottom of the spout that's attached to plastic pipe laid underground leading away from the area makes the emitter act like a water discharge point. A spring-loaded cap

opens and closes according to water pressure. It also keeps debris and rodents from clogging the drain, and can be color-matched to the surrounding landscape.

If your green thumb always turns black with root rot, consider where you are planting. "The No. 1 issues we see in landscaping are the wrong types of plants planted in the wrong place around a home," Heinz says. "Never plant shrubs and plants that will grow to five and six feet in front of low windows. Don't plant cacti, which require very little water, next to bloomers that require a lot of water; and don't plant in muddy spots without draining the water away."

"There are many options available for properly irrigating your garden or yard," Doss says. "We design a sprinkler system based on zones that allow for a variety of plant sensitivity. You set different types of watering mechanisms according to the zone."

**N**ot every zone of the yard requires a sprinkler. A rose garden prefers a drip irrigation system to water only the roots but not the leaves, which are susceptible to fungus if watered. "Misters are excellent for tight areas like flower beds," Doss says. "Misters are 50 percent faster than rotors, but rotors are best for large areas like the grass in your yard."

Although water conservation is not as



Irrigation system pop-up nozzles direct water onto a lush landscape.

much of a priority in North Alabama as it is in other parts of the country, summers of drought can bring an increase in your public utility water bill for irrigation purposes. "Weather sensors and smart controllers are both excellent ways to conserve water," Heinz says. "Evapotranspiration rate (ET) weather sensors have evolved from simply interrupting the water cycle when a rain event occurs, to transmitting on-site weather conditions to a controller which adjusts the amount of water to apply." Economically priced, ET weather sensors work from multiple programs separating the landscape into different zones. Smart controllers use a simple sensor to determine the amount of water needed for your landscape, reducing water consumption by 30 percent.

Contacting Huntsville Utilities about

installing a second water meter can also save water costs over the long term, Doss says. "When you run your sprinkler system off the same meter as your household, sewage costs are included. With a second meter, you aren't paying those costs."

**D**oss says there are also common sense ways to conserve water. "The biggest waste of water comes from overwatering," he says. "Most of the water runs off rather than being absorbed. Water fewer times for shorter periods; install a shut-off device that detects moisture and rain. Inspect your sprinkler heads periodically to make sure they aren't clogged, and water in the mornings when the sun is low and the wind is calm."

# Get the buzz on mosquito abatement



Bob Gathany / The Huntsville Times

**Kyle Paseur with Mosquito Squad sprays a yard to eliminate mosquitos.**

Do you remember the days of spraying yourself down with an acrid mosquito repellent?

You'll be happy to know technology has found much less invasive ways to keep mosquitoes and other flying summertime pests like gnats and fleas at bay. Today you have several effective and environmentally safe options.

Barrier protection is the most economical choice. Both Mosquito Nix and Mosquito Squad of Huntsville offer a fogging service in which a certified technician wearing a backpack apparatus much like a leaf blower sprays a barrier around your outdoor living area, concentrating on the surrounding foliage. The spray is a synthetic non-chemical secret formula derived from chrysanthemums, lemon grass, and plant oils. Mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas die when they land on leaves coated with the solution.

Barrier fogging leaves a residual coating that lasts about three weeks, but may be applied up to a couple of times a month for maximum coverage. Barrier applications are most effective

April through October and are safe for humans, children and pets. A special formula used around lakes, ponds, and rivers is non-toxic to marine life.

Mosquito Nix of Huntsville offers a new product called a portable mosquito abatement unit. When filled with an EPA approved repellent solution purchased from Mosquito Nix, you can roll the lightweight tank on wheels along the outer barriers of your outdoor living area, building your own blockade against pests. "The wind disperses the solution across an area of about 3,000 square feet," says general manager Blake Carter. "It is also activated by remote control when needed."

Outdoor commercial venues such as amphitheatres, picnic areas, parks, botanical gardens, ballparks, marinas and office atriums also benefit from fogging applications. Single applications are available to people planning one-time outdoor events.

Mosquito Squad also offers an all-natural spray that is not as potent as the barrier spray, but is perfect for the avid green-living advocate. Using 100

percent essential organic oils, the spray is applied every couple of weeks by a technician using the fogging device. "The difference is that the all-natural spray kills on contact, but it does not leave residual," says Mosquito Squad owner Patty Mengert. "Because it is more quickly broken down by sunlight, it doesn't last as long."

At the top end of the spectrum are mosquito misting systems. Misting systems consist of misting nozzles so small they are only noticeable if you know where to look. Laid out in zones about 10 feet apart so they can be triggered by timers, or set to all go off at once, these nozzles are linked together by tiny pressurized hoses connected to a 55-gallon drum of repellent, hidden alongside the pool equipment or an air conditioning unit so it isn't noticeable.

Installed in the trees and shrubs, hidden under the home's eaves, or along a fence line, nozzles spray throughout the day for 30-45 seconds, providing the most effective long-term mosquito abatement protection available.

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