

## **EFFICIENT LAWN WATERING**

### **Reducing Sprinkler Run-Off**

How often do you see sprinklers functioning but the water is pointlessly running into the gutter? Sometimes does it seem like the street is getting more water than grass, trees, shrubs, and other plants? Green gutters are caused primarily by runoff of excess water and fertilizer that promotes algae growth.

The main cause of run-off is that more water is applied than can be absorbed into the soil. Another cause of runoff is misdirected sprinkler heads that point or overspray on to the pavement. As well as wasting water, runoff can cause erosion and pollute our storm water, which goes to the Bay, with fertilizers and other chemicals.

It is estimated that 25% of the water processed for human consumption is wasted by inefficient irrigation practices in the landscape.

Maintain your irrigation system regularly. Check the coverage of sprinkler heads routinely and adjust them if they create run-off on walks and driveways. Avoid leaks and breaks by clearing the system of water before a winter freeze. The tips below will help you avoid run-off and waste when you water your lawn.

#### **For Established Lawns:**

- Based upon soil characteristics, water will soak into the ground at differing rates. Sandy soils have high (fast) infiltration rates, while clay soils have low (slow) infiltration rates. If the precipitation rate of the sprinkler heads exceeds the soil's infiltration rate, then runoff and erosion occur (especially on slopes). On flat ground, this will also lead to puddling. If your sprinklers' precipitation rate exceeds the infiltration rate, lower precipitation rate heads can be installed, or you can shorten your watering times and use multiple start times (e.g. 3 start times at 5 minutes each at 1-hour intervals instead of 15 minutes all at once) to allow the water to soak into the soil.
- For hand watering, use the cycle and soak method of watering. Run sprinkler for 5-7 minutes and then let it soak while you move on to a new area. Then come back and do another short cycle.
- Core aerate every year in spring and/or fall. Leave the plugs to break down naturally and top dress aeration holes with compost.
- Adjust sprinklers to only spray on grass and planted surfaces and away from paved surfaces.
- If you have sprinklers that spray across the sidewalks, retrofit them. There should be no wasteful overspray onto sidewalk, patio, driveway or street. If there is overspray, replace the nozzle with another with the appropriate spray pattern (e.g. 180° instead of 360°) or relocate the sprinkler head.
- Consider removing turf along sidewalks if you can't keep it green. Replace with flower, shrub beds, or mulch.
- Lay a soaker hose out on dry spots and turn it on low.

- Make sure that the spray from the head is not obstructed by vegetation or other objects. Trim back vegetation or raise the sprinkler heads as needed. This will increase the system's uniformity of coverage.
- If the spray pattern of a head is distorted, brown spots may develop on the lawn. This may be caused by blockage in the screen or in the nozzle itself, and the head may need to be cleaned. If this does not fix the problem, the nozzle may be worn and needs to be replaced.

**For New Lawns:**

- Amend your soil properly with 4-6 cubic yards of compost per 1000 square feet of area and incorporate it in to a minimum depth of 6-8 inches.
- Avoid putting turf on areas that slope to paved surfaces or that may cause problems for your neighbors.
- Use the areas between grass and paved surfaces as transition areas for shrubs, flowers and ground covers. These plants get the over spray from sprinklers rather than paved surfaces.
- Don't design sprinklers to spray across sidewalks!