

# Irrigation System Startup



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What you need to know to get the water flowing again



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Doing a backflow test is vital prior to starting up a customer's irrigation system.

Photos courtesy of Metro Lawn Sprinklers & Landscapes.

It may not seem like it after the crazy winter weather we've endured, but spring is right around the corner, and now is the time to start thinking about getting your clients' irrigation systems ready for the upcoming season.

It sounds simple enough: turn on the system, get the water going and you're ready to keep everything lush and green. However, there are some very important steps you need to take. If done incorrectly, you risk damaging pipes or system components.

Metro Lawn Sprinklers & Landscapes, headquartered in St. Peters, Mo., and owned by Bob and Patty Ferguson, is a full-service company founded in 1991. The Fergusons run one of the most respected irrigation and landscape companies in their market. St. Peters is a city of about 52,000 people in St. Charles County just outside of St. Louis. The city is consistently ranked as one of the best places to live in the United States by Money magazine.

Every spring, the Fergusons take pride in getting their clients' properties in pristine condition for the upcoming season. When it comes to irrigation systems, Metro Lawn employees follow a strict routine in making sure that they are running properly.

When activating irrigation systems, these are the 11 steps they swear by:

1. Greet homeowner and check to see if there were any issues from the previous year.
2. Document any wet areas prior to start up.
3. Locate the backflow preventer and close all test cocks and #1 and #2 ball valve.
4. Turn water supply on slowly up to the backflow preventer, open valves.
5. Test the backflow preventer.
6. Turn on the ball valves at the backflow preventer slowly and allow main line to fill, when you hear the water stop running the main line should be charged, if water is still flowing walk the property for a main line leak, a zone stuck open, hose bibs open or pond fills.
7. If the main line is charged go to controller and check how many zones are wired, run through all stations on the controller, walk the lateral lines inspecting for possible leaks, make necessary adjustments to heads for coverage, check heads for leaking seals, clear debris, grass, mulch or any other obstructions around heads, be sure heads retract. Raise, lower and/or straighten heads as needed. Check rotation speed of rotors (for preventative maintenance the heads could be going out). Clear grass from around valve boxes, height of valve box and condition of lid; also check wire connections.



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Knowledgeable irrigation techs follow a careful step-by-step plan in spring sprinkler startups to make sure all components are working correctly.

8. Set the controller for appropriate day and time, set watering schedule. Check with homeowner for any special settings required, check battery backup for controller as needed.
9. If there is a rain sensor check the battery and positioning of sensor.
10. Return to the backflow preventer and check for leaks or water dripping from relief valve. If water still appears to be slightly flowing perform a pressure test on system.
11. Visit with homeowner upon completion to discuss status of the system.

There are a few things you need to keep in mind. It is important that the ground is completely thawed before performing this service. The cold winter months can be brutal to underground pipes, so you want to be sure that you are past the time when they can freeze and burst. You also want to be sure to go slow, as pressures in the pipes can change during the winter. One of the main things you want to avoid is a rush of water flowing into an empty pipe due to a surge of air pressure, which could burst fittings and possibly cause the entire system to fail.

If the systems were winterized properly, spring start up should be a breeze. However, after this cold, crazy winter, you want to be sure to double-check the entire system.

To stay ahead of the game, be sure to contact your customers early to start setting up appointments. That way you can ensure to get to all of your clients.

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