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How to program a sprinkler system

A poorly programmed irrigation controller is often cited as the primary reason for customer complaints and callbacks in the industry. Modern controllers offer various features and programming options, which can increase complexity and lead to frustration when servicing them. This article aims to provide a basic understanding of how controllers work, how to program them, and an overview of complex features. The electromechanical controller is a basic type that uses gears, dials, and pins to control irrigation schedules. It typically has three separate dials for setting start time, day of the week to water, and station run times. To program it, simply push the pins in for "on" or leave them up for "off." Despite being reliable and easy to use, electromechanical controllers lack features compared to electronic or hybrid ones. Solid-state controllers, on the other hand, are like small computers that offer more features but also require more programming complexity. Hybrid controllers combine the ease of use of electromechanical controllers with the versatility of solid-state ones, featuring sophisticated electronic circuitry and an easy-to-use panel with dials and switches. They often come with a display window to guide you through programming and display information about the watering cycle. When choosing a controller, consider its ability to support multiple programs for different areas of the landscape. For instance, a heavily shaded area may require less frequent watering than a sunny one. By using separate programs, you can effectively water each area without over- or under-watering it. Additionally, look for controllers with a master valve/pump start feature that allows you to operate a booster pump when needed or control the flow of water to the irrigation system. This can be especially helpful in areas requiring extra water pressure. Most controllers also have a switch to shut down all irrigation programs, which is useful during rainy periods or cloudy days. Some more advanced controllers even come with a "rain delay" feature to further optimize watering schedules based on weather conditions. Allows for flexible irrigation scheduling by temporarily pausing or adjusting watering schedules. For instance, if forecasted rain showers are expected, you can suspend watering for a few days to allow soil to dry out. Some systems feature built-in rain sensors that automatically halt watering when moisture is detected. These sensors can be overridden to resume watering as needed. Water budgeting capabilities enable adjustments to normal watering times without resetting individual stations. This feature helps accommodate seasonal changes by modifying run times on a percentage basis (0-300%). With this flexibility, you can adjust watering schedules for different programs and stations. Understanding the basics of irrigation controller programming - start time, days of the week, and run times per station - reduces frustration and potentially minimizes customer complaints. 1. Set Current Time, Date, and Year - Go to the "Current Time/Day" setting on your Hunter sprinkler system controller and adjust the numbers using the plus and minus buttons until they display accurately, including AM/PM. 2. Establish Start Times - Set the start times for your sprinklers by twisting the dial to the "Start Times" position and adjusting the time using the left and right arrow buttons. 3. Configure Run Times - Twist the dial again to the "Run Times" position and adjust the run time according to the season, taking into account your local water schedule. 4. Program Watering Days - Switch to the "Water Days" setting and use the left and right arrows to cycle through the days of the week, programming each day as either a water day or a no-water day based on your address and local water schedule. 5. Verify Coverage Ensure all settings are correctly programmed to avoid overwatering or underwatering areas of your lawn or garden. To make sure that your sprinklers are covering the right areas, switch to "Manual One Station" mode. This lets you test each station individually for a short time. Check if any sprinklers have moved and are spraying unwanted areas or if there's a blockage in the pipes. It's also a good idea to do this test once a month to ensure everything is working properly. In "Manual One Station" mode, adjust the run time using the plus and minus buttons for each station. For this quick test, three minutes should be enough. Then, switch to "Run" mode and the sprinkler system will turn on automatically. After checking one station, let it finish its cycle or shut it off manually. Switch back to "Manual One Station" mode and use the left and right arrow buttons to move to the next station. Keep doing this until you've checked all stations. When you're finished setting up your start times, run times, and watering days, turn the dial to "Run" again. This should activate your Hunter sprinkler system according to your programmed settings. If your controller shows a flashing sprinkler icon but the sprinklers aren't running, there might be a problem with the wiring at the valves or your water supply could be shut off. If you have a master valve, check if it's not opening properly. Inspect the wire connections for any damage or looseness. Reasons why your Hunter sprinkler system might turn on again include too many programmed start times, as each active program only needs one start time. Also, check if there are any faulty devices plugged into the SmartPort or incorrect wiring that could be causing interference. If your system won't turn on, first check the sprinkler controller and wiring for any issues. It's also possible that a device is not properly connected to the SmartPort. It's essential to check that your system isn't blocked with dirt or it's just faulty. Either way, this could stop your system from working correctly. If the sprinkler heads aren't the problem, then you might have busted pipes, low voltage, a faulty valve, or perhaps the backflow device valves ain't fully turned on. That's a Wrap Now that you're more familiar with how to use your Hunter controller, operating it should be a breeze. By setting everything up right, you can keep your lawn looking good and maybe even lower your water bill a bit.