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How to Transition Your Irrigation from Sprinklers to Dripline When Replacing Grass with Xeriscaping: A Homeowner's Guide

Converting your lawn to a water-wise ColoradoScape, and transitioning your irrigation system from sprinklers to drip line, can greatly reduce water usage and ensure efficient watering for drought-tolerant plants. This guide will walk you through the process, making it easy to transform your landscape into a beautiful, low-water oasis...the right way.

Step 1: Planning Your Xeriscape and Drip System

Map Out the Area: Sketch a simple layout of your yard, identifying where you'll place new plants, trees, and hardscaping (e.g., rocks, pathways). Group plants with similar water needs together for efficient watering.



Determine Water Zones: Divide your yard into zones based on plant water needs. For example, native perennials may need less water than newly planted shrubs. This helps you adjust drip line flow for each zone through specific emitters.

Choose the Right Dripline: Drip tubing comes in various flow rates (e.g., 0.5 to 2 gallons per hour). For xeriscape areas, select a dripline that provides slow, deep watering to encourage strong root growth and select tubing and emitters that give the right amount of gallons per hour needed for specific flowers, shrubs, and trees.

Step 2: Removing Existing Sprinkler Heads

Shut Off Water Supply: Turn off your irrigation system at the main valve to avoid water spillage.



Cap Unnecessary Sprinkler Heads: Remove sprinkler heads that are not needed for the new drip line layout and cap the pipes - leaving them in the ground. This prevents leaks and pressure loss in the system but helps you avoid digging them all out of the ground.

Convert Needed Sprinkler Heads to Dripline: Choose a central sprinkler head in each zone to serve as a connection point for the dripline going to your trees and plants. Replace this head with a conversion kit, which will allow you to attach drip tubing directly to the existing underground line. Note: When you convert a sprinkler zone to a drip line zone, you need to add a backflow device and pressure reducer to that line in the ground manifold box first. You must do this to each zone being used for drip line to trees or plants.

Step 3: Installing the Dripline System

Lay Out the Tubing: Run drip tubing along the plant beds, ensuring that it reaches the root zones of each plant. Secure the tubing with landscape staples every 2-3 feet to keep it in place.

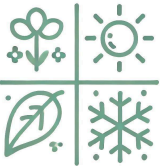


Add Emitters: Add individual emitters (0.5-2 gallons per hour) directly into the tubing at each plant's base. For groundcover or densely planted areas, consider using pre-perforated drip line tubing that evenly waters along its length.

Test the System: Turn the water back on and run a test to ensure there are no leaks and that each plant is receiving the appropriate amount of water. Adjust emitter placement or flow as needed.

Step 4: Fine-Tuning and Maintenance

Adjust Watering Times: Set your timer to run less frequently but for longer periods. Drip systems are designed to water deeply, so adjust your schedule to ensure moisture reaches deep into the soil (typically running for 15-30 minutes depending on the plants).



Inspect for Clogs: Check emitters and tubing monthly for any clogs, which can occur from debris or hard water build-up. Clean or replace clogged emitters to maintain efficiency.

Seasonal Adjustments: Reduce watering during cooler months and adjust as needed in the heat of summer. Remember, xeriscape plants typically need less water as they establish. Also, keep in mind, at the end of the season and prior to the first frost in the fall, the irrigation system should be blown out and shut down for the winter to prevent water freezing and cracking the lines.

Benefits of Switching to Drip Irrigation

Water Efficiency: Drip irrigation delivers water directly to the root zone, minimizing evaporation and runoff. It can reduce water use by up to 50% compared to sprinklers.



Healthier Plants: Drip systems reduce water on plant leaves, lowering the risk of fungal diseases and promoting deeper root growth.

Cost Savings: Lower water bills and reduced maintenance mean long-term savings for you.

Final Tips

Smart Irrigation Controllers: These devices will replace what you currently have (typically in your garage) to help save water and reduce utility costs by automatically adjusting watering schedules based on weather, soil moisture, and plant needs. These systems are controlled at the unit or via an app on your phone to prevent overwatering and runoff, ensuring landscapes get the right amount of water only when needed. In drought-prone areas like Colorado, smart controllers are an effective way to promote water conservation and maintain healthy, resilient landscapes.

IMPORTANT: You must set up these tree drip line systems on their own irrigation zone. Your trees should not be irrigated on the same zone as your perennial flowers and shrubs. Tree irrigation zones run for much more time than your perennial garden needs.

Checking the Soil: Use a trowel or screwdriver to dig down 8 inches and check the soil moisture. Soggy is bad. Damp is good. Dry means it is time to water immediately.

Mulch Around Plants: After installing the dripline, cover the soil with a 2-3 inch layer of organic mulch. This helps retain moisture and keeps roots cool.

Check Local Regulations: Some areas may offer rebates for converting from traditional grass lawns to xeriscape and using drip irrigation—check with your local water authority.

By following this guide, you'll make the transition from a water-thirsty lawn to a beautiful, water-wise landscape. Your new drip irrigation system will ensure your xeriscape thrives with minimal effort and maximum efficiency.

Does this feel a bit overwhelming? No worries at all—we're more than happy to come out for a site visit and help you get started. We'll walk you through everything step by step!

We love irrigation!
Need figuring it all out?
Want us to check your plan or build one with you?

ClimateScaping is here to help!
Email us today to set up a site-visit!



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