

WATER DROPS

Preparing Your Irrigation System for Warmer Weather

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We are finally waving goodbye to what was an unusually lengthy Houston winter full of cold snaps with freezing or close to freezing temperatures (our neighbors to the north are rolling their eyes at us right about now). In preparation for winter, it's likely you stored away your sprinklers and hoses or made some adjustments to your automatic irrigation system. According to Texas A&M's ET (Evapotranspiration) schedule, most of the watering requirements from October through February for turf and shrubs should be supplied by rainfall, and luckily, we received a pretty steady stream of rain throughout those months and beyond.

Is Your Irrigation System Ready for the Heat?

Before the hot and possibly dry weather is in full swing once again, it's wise to check and see if there are any irrigation system improvements or repairs that can proactively be addressed. Maximizing efficiencies and repairing issues now will not only improve performance and conserve water, but will also help you avoid emergency repairs in stifling weather. Consider inspecting spray heads, sprays and rotors to determine if there are breaks, clogs, misalignments, or other factors affecting proper distribution of water. Many problems are simple to fix and others may require the help of a licensed irrigation specialist. Clogged spray heads can be unscrewed, disassembled, and the plastic insert screen removed. Once cleaned, the plastic insert screen can be reinstalled. A misaligned rotor or spray head can be extracted and reset properly. Both an irrigation supply company and a "big box" home improvement store may provide assistance in solving a problem with the system. Now is a great time to also consider converting some shrub beds to drip irrigation to enhance proper watering with less evaporation or water waste. (Source: *The Courier*, Jim Bundscho, Montgomery County Master Gardener)

Develop Strong Root Systems to Increase Your Lawn's Resilience

If you have an underground sprinkler system, odds are it's equipped with an automatic timer. This can be a major convenience, but can also result in over-watered lawns and wasteful watering practices. Why? Think about this: in southeast Texas, unlike many other regions of the U.S., we get our occasional rains. And on rainy days, we don't need to supplement with our sprinkler system – nature has already done the work for



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Do you have a water or sewer-related **EMERGENCY**? Call MUD 132's new dedicated **EMERGENCY** line at 281-398-8211. For other service-related questions, view our full list of contact numbers on the District website at: www.hcmud132.com/contact.

us. It is, however, easy to forget to turn those automatic timers off, and as a result, it's not uncommon to see sprinkler systems running full force during or soon after a rainstorm.

So, what effect does over-watering have on your lawn and pocketbook? Officials with municipal and county water agencies are fully aware that over-watering is the most frequent mistake homeowners make in lawn care. In fact, according to the Texas Water Development Board (TWBD), as much as **half** of our outdoor water use in the warmer months is wasted because of poor watering practices.

Lawns irrigated three or four times a week, or everyday for that matter, cause grass and plants to develop a shallow root system, resulting in a real vulnerability to hot and dry weather and an inability to survive without constant watering. The easiest way to correct this problem is to gradually reduce the frequency of watering.* It may feel uncomfortable at first, but you'll be promoting a healthier yard...allowing root systems to push deeper into the soil in search of a drink. Before you know it, your lawn will be able to survive with less sprinkling sessions and you'll see a welcome savings on your water bill.

Looking for another way to help your lawn hold moisture? Don't cut your grass too short. Optimum height for St. Augustine is three inches. Anything shorter than this can cause the soil to dry out quickly and can cut into the stem – causing grass to lose its ability to photosynthesize and making it more susceptible to disease and insect problems.

What is a Rain Sensor and Why Should You Have One Installed?

The demand for water in Texas is increasing. In an effort to help conserve this precious natural resource – also known as “blue gold” – residents and business owners charged with taking care of landscaping are urged to install rain sensors, or rain shut-off devices, on automatic sprinkler systems.

Rain sensors – small devices wired to the common line on an automatic sprinkler system – are designed to override and shut off the automatic watering cycle when a certain level of rainfall is detected (shut-off level is usually set at ¼ inch of rain). Rain sensors do not affect the sprinkler system's overall timing device. Once the collection dish dries out, the automatic timer kicks in.

Rain sensors not only protect your lawn from over-watering and provide sometimes significant cost savings on your water bill, but they also cut down on the wear and tear of your sprinkler system.

If you have an automatic sprinkler system, consider adding a rain sensor today. Or if you have plans to upgrade or add a brand new system, make sure a sensor is included. Your lawn and your pocketbook will thank you!

**The recommended watering cycle in warmer weather is two periods of irrigation per week – about ½-inch of water per period (which usually takes about 15 minutes). Manual systems take longer to deliver the ½-inch of water required, so you might consider placing a few short empty cans (ex. Tuna fish cans) on the lawn and time how long it takes to reach the ½-inch mark.*

Are You Allowing Enough Time When Paying Bills Online?



For many of us, online bill payment is the norm and a very convenient way to save on paper and the cost of stamps. If you are paying online using your bank's bill pay system, it's best to understand the path your payment takes once you authorize the transfer. This knowledge will help to eliminate any chance that your payment will be received past due, and as a result, eliminate past due penalties.

Consider the following:

Utilizing your bank's online bill pay system is not the same thing as an Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). With EFT, your funds are sent electronically straight from your bank to the institution in which you are sending payment. With online bill pay through your bank, an actual paper check is cut in a processing center (sometimes out-of-state). Once the check is cut, it is often batched with other

payments and mailed. The preparing and mailing of the check is the longest and most unpredictable part of the process. Once mailed, the payments are received each business day at the United States Post Office on Smith Street in downtown Houston. They are then delivered to the bank where they are opened, scanned, logged, and put into an electronic file. MUD 132 receives that file each business day between 3:30 and 4:00 p.m.

The bottom line? Online bill payment through your banking institution is NOT immediate and it's best to build in plenty of lead time for your payment to be received – in most cases, 7-10 business days. MUD 132 payments received late are assessed a 10% penalty, so please factor in lead times when mailing your own check or paying online via your bank's website.

MUD 132 is in the process of implementing an EFT bill payment system through a dedicated website, and that option will be made available to our customers later this year. We will keep you updated on the status of that system (in your bills, upcoming newsletters and via our website at www.hcmud132.com).

If you have any questions on bill payment, please contact our District operator, Severn Trent Services at 281-579-4500. For general MUD 132 service information, call 281-209-2100.

“Lifting” Tree Branches Can Improve the Health and Beauty of Your Lawn



There are many different benefits to “pruning” a tree and a number of different methods. In this article, we will fill you in on the many benefits to “crown lifting” or “crown raising”. The term “crown” is often used when describing tree pruning techniques and it refers to the tree’s canopy – the leaf and branch area, and not the trunk.

The lifting or raising of branches should be performed on young or medium-aged trees to prevent low branches from growing to a large diameter. Large, low branches are not as much of an issue in parks or other open landscapes where passage under a canopy is not needed, but in home and/or urban settings, it can be an issue. Low branches on trees can obstruct views, interfere with pedestrian and vehicular traffic, restrict light, etc.

Crown lifting, specifically, is the removal of the lowest branches and/or the preparing of lower branches for future removal. So which branches should (and should not) be removed and why is the lifting of mature trees discouraged?

Best practices suggest that crown lifting should NOT include the removal of large branches growing directly from the trunk. This can result in large wounds which can decay and lead to further long-term problems. This issue is most often seen in older, more mature trees as the lower branches have had time to grow large and strong. In more mature trees, it is best to restrict removal to secondary branches. Branches can also be shortened, rather than removed.

Benefits to “Lifting” Trees in Your Own Yard

- Lifting keeps branches from beating on the roof and eave of your home.
- Crown lifting keeps your trees healthy and encourages growth. On most trees, the lower branches die and break off once they are under heavy shade from higher branches.
- Lifting allows more light under the tree which encourages the growth of small shrubs and ground cover.

- Depending on the location of the tree, lifting the branches will allow more light into your home.
- Also depending on the location of the tree, lifting branches will enhance security of your home by eliminating hiding places for potential thieves.

While You’re At It...

As always, MUD 132 is committed to promoting water conservation and we can’t miss a chance to provide a few tips to preserve that precious natural resource. It’s spring and your lawn is coming back to life. Weeds and unwanted plants growing in your landscaped areas can pull precious water from the soil and compete with the more desirable plants you want to thrive. This is a great time to remove those weeds and unwanted plants to conserve soil moisture and prevent seed production.

Proper mulching can also help to conserve water and inhibit weed growth. Water evaporates from the surface of wet soil after irrigation or rain. As the surface dries, more moisture moves upward from wet soil below. This loss of water can be reduced by applying a 3-4 inch thick layer of medium textured bark or similar mulch on top of the soil around trees and shrubs. This mulch will help control weeds and protect the soil’s surface from sun and wind. To maximize water savings, the mulch should have a medium texture with pieces about one inch in size. This will allow water to pass quickly through the mulch into the soil and not be retained by the mulch.

For more information on water conservation, crown lifting/raising or proper tree pruning in general, speak to a local tree expert and/or visit your neighborhood nursery. Planning ahead-of-time for the health and beauty of your lawn is always the best bet and will benefit you for years to come.

Sources: *About.com Forestry; University of Florida IFAS Extension; www.mastergardnersandiego.org*

Rainfall Statistics: January 2012 - March 2014 (Total Inches/Month)

For the latest rainfall statistics (by month), visit our website anytime at www.hcmud132.com and click on the “Rainfall Statistics” link.

Month	2012	2013	2014
Jan	4.65	6.25	1.30
Feb	9.20	3.90	2.90
March	6.95	0.55	3.01
April	0.00	2.75	
May	0.40	1.25	
June	2.30	1.60	
July	3.10	5.70	
Aug	0.40	2.95	
Sept	0.75	4.40	
Oct	4.35	1.15	
Nov	3.15	0.25	
Dec	6.70	3.90	
Total In./Yr	44.75	61.36	7.21
			(to date)

*Source: Severn Trent Services (STS) Rain Gauge at Sewer Plant #109

MUD 132 Engineer Spotlight: Matt Froehlich



Brown & Gay Engineers (BGE) has been the engineering firm of record for HCMUD 132 since November of 2002, and in July of 2013, our District was assigned a new and very capable primary contact from Brown & Gay – Matt Froehlich. A native Houstonian and Texas A&M graduate, Matt is a licensed Professional Engineer in Texas and Michigan. He has worked at BGE since June 2010 and has been working with “mature” MUDs like HCMUD 132 for 9 years. Matt is also very familiar with the intricacies of our region as he currently works with two other MUDs in the Atascocita area, HCMUD 109 and HCMUD 153, as well as the Atascocita Joint Operations Board for the regional Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP).

Matt’s experience with “mature” MUDs and aging infrastructures is especially important considering the maintenance and rehabilitation needs that naturally come along with a District that has been around as long as MUD 132.

“The biggest challenge for MUD 132 is maintaining and rehabilitating aging water distribution and sanitary sewer collection systems,” said Froehlich. “Above ground facilities like the District’s water plants and lift stations are fairly easy to inspect and maintain, but with water lines and sewers, you don’t know the condition (other than the age and material of the equipment) unless you perform a video inspection. MUD 132 is very committed to proactive televising and planning, and as a result, defects are repaired before they become bigger issues.”

MUD 132 continues to proactively maintain and, when necessary, rehabilitate or replace our infrastructure. Together with BGE, we regularly review and update a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) that has identified potential projects in the 5, 10 and 20-year range.

BGE also recently completed a water system model and analysis for MUD 132.

“The model allowed us to see any inefficiencies or weaknesses in the system as well as how different water demand scenarios impact pressure and flow within the system,” said Froehlich. “Creating the model and running the analysis was a positive step by MUD 132 in identifying any potential improvement projects that may be necessary. Fortunately, the analysis confirmed the system adequately meets the District’s current and future needs.”

In addition to ongoing maintenance and planning needs,

BGE is responsible for design and construction projects and the receiving and reviewing of requests for water and sewer capacity from potential developers and construction plans for new commercial or residential development within the District.

“MUD 132 has quite a bit of commercial property and businesses come and go, so these responsibilities can keep us pretty busy,” said Froehlich. “You never really know which requests or plan submittals will become reality, so BGE reviews and considers them all on behalf of the District. In addition, we work closely with MUD 132’s Operator, Severn Trent Services, to provide assistance when engineering issues arise related to the operation of the District’s facilities.”

The long, successful relationship between MUD 132 and BGE is in large part due to mutual values. Like MUD 132, Brown & Gay operates with a focus on integrity, commitment, respect for their people, and an excellent reputation. Matt Froehlich is another fine representative of those values and we are happy to have him on board.

“In the relatively short time I’ve worked with MUD 132, it’s been easy for me to see how committed this Board and their consultants are to serving the constituents of this District,” said Froehlich. “This shared focus, I believe, has been the foundation of the highly successful partnership between MUD 132 and BGE.”

Matt and his wife, Melissa, celebrated their 2nd anniversary this past November, and welcomed their first child, Luke, in April of 2013. They enjoy spending time with family and friends, traveling, trying out new restaurants, and serving at their church. In his spare time (which can be pretty limited with a busy career and young son), Matt enjoys home-brewing and playing and watching hockey.

Who to Call...

Water, sewer and drainage questions:

Harris County MUD 132 Customer Service Office 283 Lockhaven, Suite 208 Houston, TX 77073

Billing Questions: 281.579.4500 **Service Calls:** 281-209-2100

Emergencies: 281-398-8211

NOTE: If you have water or sewer related problems,

PLEASE CALL US BEFORE YOU CALL THE PLUMBER! We will investigate the problem at no cost to you. If it is found to be a water district-related problem, we will arrange to correct it. If it is not a water district issue, we will provide our advice. Remember, we are here to help!

HCMUD 132 Tax Questions

Bob Leared Interests 713.932.9011 (Ask for the HCMUD 132 representative)

Garbage Service Waste Management 713.686.6666

HCMUD 132 Board Meetings The Harris County MUD 132 Board generally meets the 3rd Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m. For meeting location, please check the District website. **Visit us online:** www.hcmud132.com