



# JULY SMART IRRIGATION MONTH

BY SUSAN MADDOCKS

**J**uly has arrived, which means that Smart Irrigation Month is in full swing. Do you have your Smart team in place? To make things a little more interesting, the Irrigation Association (IA) is having a Smart Irrigation Month Marketing contest; Hunter Industries is also having one. If you haven't entered, it's not too late.

Here are some quick facts about Smart Irrigation Month.

Launched by the IA in 2005, the event currently has more than 27 states participating. It's held in July, because that's the time of year when water demands are at their peak for lawns, gardens and landscapes. During the month of July, consumers typically over-water their lawns and landscapes by up to 30 percent.

The goal of the campaign is to increase public awareness about the efficient use of water and to grow demand for water-saving products, practices and services. So think of July as the time to make your customers *ooh* and *ahh*, not over Fourth of July fireworks, but at the prospect of saving water. By participating in this month's industry event, and hopefully continuing this practice year-round, you'll help keep costs down for your clients and conserve our most precious resource, water.

Jerry Grossi, general manager of ArborLawn, Inc., in Lansing, Michigan, whole-heartedly supports Smart Irrigation Month. "We have an employee who is water certified, and we're promoting a program that reviews or audits our customers' irrigation systems to give them accurate measures of the water they are using. From this information, we can show

our clients ways to reduce or be more efficient with their water usage."

ArborLawn has embraced smart technology, and in the last couple of years converted a number of its customers over to smart controllers. "We work with our clients until we feel that their systems are operating properly and saving them money. We also have worked with several management companies to update or upgrade their sprinkler heads to more efficient ones."

The most important element of the job is to measure the results of the improvements. Grossi says, "A lot of the products available for water conservation are great but unless you can track and measure exact water use, the device may not be of any value to your customer." By measuring the results, you're providing what the customer wants most, a return on their investment. You will instantly earn client loyalty by helping them reduce their water bills.

Whether you're caring for lawns or monitoring irrigation systems at corporate headquarters, here are some suggestions to help save water. Check the adjustment of any irrigation sprinkler to reduce water on non-target areas. Replace older equipment with high-efficiency nozzles to achieve more uniform coverage; this



simple step will reduce run times and save water. Make sure that all systems are operating at optimal water pressure.

Promote and use the most current water-saving technology. "A good way to update an irrigation system is to install a rain sensor, smart controller or moisture sensor," says Bill Horn, vice president of Terracare Associates in Martinez, California. "Nowadays, you can manage them with a laptop computer or tablet from anywhere."

"Another thing we try to get our customers to understand is that everything is going to real-time irrigation. By using a feature such as a weather sensor, you can get real time ET data without the need for an ET gauge," he said. "Sometimes, you just have to get your clients to look at water use in a variety of different ways."

Horn goes on to point out that you have a lot to offer your customers today that will help conserve water. For example, geographic information system (GIS) mapping, a software tool that manages, analyzes and models data from our environment. "Your controls are all on a map and by using a geographic location, it gives you the status of each controller, as well as main line breaks and flow alerts," Horn said. This not only saves water, but time and money, and allows you to maintain an irrigation system so it can continually operate at peak performance.

Celebrate this month as well by keeping current on where commercial landscape trends are heading. "Things are changing rapidly with new technology; you need to stay on top of it. Future growth continues towards sustainability—more sustainable landscapes, instead of large expanses of turf grass," Horn says.

With the focus on sustainability, it's a good idea to have your clients take a look at the landscaped areas they have and what they are being used for. Would they like to cut down some of the turf areas and use native and drought-tolerant plant material, thus providing a strong water conservation program while still enjoying a beautiful landscape? "There are still many contractors out there who flood irrigate to make everything look green; they're not watering to need," said Horn. This is wasteful and unnecessary.

You can help your customers choose plant materials that are native, and therefore require much less water. By selecting and planting carefully, watering wisely, and maintaining and upgrading automated irrigation systems, your clients will see better results and save water. "It's a combination of using smart technology and having your clients rethink the use of their landscaped areas," Horn commented.

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Whether it's changing the plant material to save water or helping your customers update their irrigation systems, this month take a little more time with your clients to educate them. Again, "The key is to track water usage on the properties you service so that you can adjust and monitor current systems or propose new water-saving devices for your customers," Horn says.

He continues, "The way we do this is that we look at the customer's past water bills before we do a job and then we can show them the savings later." To get people to bite, you need to show them hard dollars and when they'll get a return on their investment.

For example, on a project with a large turf area, Terracare saved a client 30 percent on their water bill in the first year. We didn't do anything extraordinary; we used their existing irrigation system properly and contin-

ued to manage it until it was dialed in to provide accurate output. At 30 percent, you're talking about substantial savings.

Don't forget to include your employees in the Smart Irrigation Month event. You might be surprised by the practical ideas they can offer to help your customers save water. Discuss the initiatives, create a smart team and foster a culture that understands the importance of saving water and building smart irrigation systems for your clients.

Encourage fellow industry firms and professionals to promote smart irrigation practices and technologies to their customers. By sharing information and talking about what other companies are doing, you might learn something new.

Create an outlet for problem solving, to encourage businesses and homeowners to maintain and improve

irrigation in their communities. Spread the word by promoting efficient watering practices and technologically advanced irrigation products.

Are you ready to put into play a couple of these suggestions but don't know where to start? Don't worry, there's plenty of help for you and your company to get the word on the street and to help your customers become water smart. Grossi suggests, "Start by going online to the Irrigation Association website to see what it's all about."

The IA provides tools, resources and educational materials to help you participate and show your clients ways they could be saving water. The free resources are available on their website. They also offer a Smart Irrigation Month "Smart Tips" newsletter. In addition, many companies have incentives or giveaways you can pass on to your customers.

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For example, Phoenix, Arizona-based Ewing Irrigation, with about 200 stores, offers a smart irrigation checklist you can download and take with you to use when addressing the watering needs of your clients. Rain Bird offers a children's coloring book with tips on saving water that you can download and pass onto your customers with small children. Toro's Irrigation Business division also offers tips on water conservation. There are many resources at your fingertips; use them to help your customers become aware of the benefits of this month.


If you don't have the time now to take a big step in celebrating Smart Irrigation Month, take some small steps. Post the Smart Irrigation Month logo on your website or below your email signature. You can also add it to PowerPoint presentations, newsletters and other business materials. Highlight it on your telephone system's on-hold message and make water-efficient solutions the theme of sales calls.

Don't forget to share your efforts with the industry; participate in the Smart Irrigation Month Marketing Contest. Regardless of your business focus or company size, the IA wants to hear about how you promoted Smart Irrigation Month. Simply submit a short description and photos to the contest by August 30th. It's free to IA members and open to nonmembers for a \$250 fee, which is credited toward their membership application. Go to [www.smartirrigationmonth.org](http://www.smartirrigationmonth.org) for more information.

Saving water is imperative. Many states are already experiencing drought conditions. We all must conserve and find better ways to utilize this precious resource.

Working together as an industry, we can increase the demand for efficient irrigation products and demonstrate the benefits of making every month a Smart Irrigation Month.

Even though it's designated for July, do what Terracare Associates does and start thinking about a Smart Water Year. It all starts with a day-to-day focus, to help your clients save water.

What is your business doing to observe Smart Irrigation Month? 



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