

Wave Outdoors Landscape + Design provides landscape design and construction in Mount Prospect. Use these planning questions to prepare a project conversation.

Why drip works better than sprinklers in planting beds

Sprinklers excel on uniform turf, where blades of grass stand at the same height and can be watered from above. Planting beds aren't uniform. They include shrubs with dense canopies, perennials with varied root depths, and mulch layers that swallow spray. Drip bypasses the inefficiencies by delivering water at ground level. You reduce evaporation dramatically, especially in hot or windy climates. You also reduce leaf wetness, which lowers the incidence of foliar diseases on roses, tomatoes, and many perennials.

The anatomy of a drip system

When the system spans a yard, you'll want separate zones for different needs. Trees like deep, infrequent soaking. Annual flowers need shallow, frequent moisture. A smart irrigation controller with soil-based scheduling or weather inputs can automate these differences. If you already have a sprinkler system, a good irrigation installation contractor can convert select zones to drip, add the right pressure regulation and filtration, and program it all under one brain.

Matching water delivery to soil and plants

Watering is not a single rule. It is a set of decisions tied to soil texture, plant type, and local weather. Start by digging a small hole and rubbing soil between your fingers. If it ribbons and compacts, you have clay. If it falls through your fingers, you have sand. Loam sits in the middle. Clay holds water longer and drains slowly. Sand drains fast and dries quickly. Loam behaves predictably.

Designing a drip layout for real gardens

A plan on paper helps. Sketch your beds and plant locations, then trace a mainline path that minimizes crossings and keeps the head assembly accessible. In beds that double as garden paths, such as stepping stones within mulch, route lines to avoid stub toes and shovel nicks. Keep mainlines along the back of beds or against edges, and run distribution lines into the plant groupings.

Keep emitter tubing in long, continuous runs when possible. Fewer fittings mean fewer leak points. Use sweeping curves instead of tight bends to prevent kinking. If a tight turn is inevitable, use an elbow fitting. Think in zones that share water needs. Group shade-loving perennials apart from sun-baked annuals. If everything shares a single zone, you'll overwater one group to satisfy the other. Account for mulch. <https://yonderstack.com/p/hb6nmVqPzTgU2gjh0I08f.pdf> Two to three inches of mulch reduces evaporation, but too much mulch can insulate water away from the soil surface. A consistent depth helps keep emitters performing predictably. Avoid placing emitters right against the plant crown. Move them slightly outward so roots reach for water and anchor better.

Maintenance that actually matters

Flush lines at the start and end of the season. Sediment accumulates at low points and line ends. Opening end caps for a minute until water runs clear keeps emitters flowing. Clean filters at the same time. If you notice

frequent clogging, check the filter mesh and consider a larger filter housing that is easier to service.

Walk the lines monthly during the growing season. Look for wet spots that indicate a break, dry stretches that indicate a kink or clogged emitter, and chew marks from critters. Rodents sometimes nibble tubing, especially in dry periods. Quick couplers and goof plugs fix small holes in minutes.

Adjust emitters as plants grow. A new shrub can make do with two emitters. In its second or third year, add more or shift them outward to match the expanding root zone. For trees, add an outer ring every couple of seasons and reduce the inner ring flow or cap it entirely.

Winterization depends on climate. In cold regions, drain the lines. Compressed air can blow out water, but keep pressure low to avoid blowing off fittings. In milder climates, simply opening end caps and letting gravity do the work is enough.

If a controller runs the system, check the schedule after power outages and after any firmware updates. Soil and weather-based features save water, but only when sensors are calibrated and zones are labeled correctly.

How drip fits with the rest of the landscape

Drainage solutions are the quiet partner to irrigation. A yard drainage issue on the downhill side of a bed can keep roots soggy and negate the precision of drip. French drains, surface drainage to a catch basin, or a dry well to handle roof downspouts can restore balance. When water has a place to go, drip can be set precisely without compensating for puddling or runoff.

Lighting needs their own caution. Low voltage lighting and landscape lighting often share the same beds as drip lines. Keep wiring and tubing separate to avoid nicks during future maintenance. Label the transformer zones and irrigation valves clearly in the valve box. Organized systems age gracefully.

What a professional adds, and when it is worth it

Is a landscaping company a good idea for installing drip irrigation? It depends on project scope and your comfort with plumbing basics. For small gardens, the most cost-effective path is often a DIY kit backed by a few hours of careful layout and testing. For large properties, complex slopes, or integration with an existing irrigation system, hiring a professional landscaper is worth the cost. The benefits of hiring a professional landscaper include design that respects plant water needs across seasons, correct zoning and pressure regulation, clean head assemblies that pass inspection, and integration with drainage and hardscape. A professional can also tie drip into smart irrigation features and provide irrigation repair down the line.

If you do hire, ask to see a sample landscape plan for irrigation. What is included in a landscaping service varies, but you should expect a clear diagram of zones, head assembly specification, filter and pressure regulator details, and a run-time schedule for different seasons. Ask about filtration mesh size, pressure testing, and how they'll protect lines around a garden path, paver driveway edges, or within mulch beds. A good landscape designer will explain plant water needs by zone and how to adjust as the garden matures. The first rule of landscaping is matching the site's realities to the design. That applies to water more than anything.

As for seasonal attention, how often should landscaping be done in terms of irrigation adjustments? Check spring, midsummer, and fall. In climates with leaf drop, what does a fall cleanup consist of regarding irrigation? Blow out leaves, lift mulch where necessary, check lines for damage during pruning work, and open end caps to drain before freezes. If you maintain turf alongside beds, coordinate lawn aeration and dethatching with a map of drip lines to avoid punctures near edges.

Budget, value, and materials that hold up

What landscaping adds the most value to a home? Healthy, established plantings that look good year-round. Drip supports that by keeping plants appropriately hydrated without staining walkways with overspray or creating muddy edges along a concrete driveway or entrance design. When combined with thoughtful pathway design and outdoor lighting, the garden reads as cared for. That perception drives value more than any single feature.

Troubleshooting with a practical eye

Even good systems run into hiccups. If a section looks thirsty while the rest is lush, check the farthest run on the zone. Pressure losses reveal themselves at the edges. You might have exceeded the recommended emitter count for that zone, or a kink sits under a pile of mulch. If the entire zone seems weak, verify the pressure regulator rating and clean the filter. When everything is soaked, reduce run times first before changing frequency. Plants endure a single long cycle better than daily shallow sprinkles, which encourage shallow roots.

Roots can invade emitters over time, especially in lines buried under aggressive groundcovers. If flow drops in a mature bed, you may need to lift or replace sections of tubing and shift the layout to a more accessible pattern. Rodent damage leaves clean bite marks. Keep a handful of goof plugs and couplers on hand. Repairs become a five-minute task.

If a controller misbehaves, old wiring or a failing solenoid valve could be the culprit rather than the drip lines themselves. Label valve boxes and keep a simple map. When a winter storm knocks out power, you'll be grateful for paper notes.

A note on seasons and scheduling

In summer heat, lean on cycle and soak programming. Instead of one long run, break it into two shorter cycles separated by an hour. Soil absorbs water better that way, especially in clay. In shoulder seasons, reduce frequency but keep duration long enough to reach roots. In winter, shut off zones that serve dormant perennials and deciduous shrubs. Evergreen beds still need moisture during dry spells, just less.

Project brief

Start with the use of the space. Record the features you want to keep, the changes you are considering and questions that need a site visit. Photographs help connect each idea with the part of the property it concerns. Keep preferences separate from a proposed construction detail until the options have been discussed.