

Lower flow is the go

Yes, you can water the lawn and not feel guilty.

A LOW flow, low pressure, water-efficient sprinkler widely used in commercial fruit and vegetable growing at last has been developed specifically for home gardeners.

The sprinkler makes use of very different irrigation technology where a stream of water is directed at the centre of a rotating deflector. As the deflector spins, it distributes water at a low angle in relatively large droplets very evenly in a circular pattern.

This is known as wobbler technology and trials just completed by TAFE School of Horticulture at Urrbrae to compare the efficiency of different sprinkler heads confirmed low-flow wobblers as a most efficient method of distributing water.

Many gardeners still own a low-cost lawn sprinkler that squirts water high into the air through a single large hole. These sprinklers are incredibly inefficient, belching out 25-30 litres of water every minute.

That is 1500-1800 litres an hour and when used to water an average front or back lawn, it is the equivalent of emptying the contents of a 5000 litre rainwater tank on to your lawn every week.

Hole in the centre or vortex sprinklers throw water high in the air and much of this is in the form of mist which simply disappears into thin air as evaporation. The remaining water is dumped on the ground much faster than the soil is able to absorb. In most cases, there is considerable wastage through run-off.

Lawn sprinklers with rotating arms are quite popular but they also are rated as inefficient as they lose considerable water

through misting while distributing water unevenly over the ground.

Sprinklers that distribute water using a rotating knocker action are more efficient but their distribution pattern is easily distorted because of wind.

The new Lo-Flo rotating wobbler developed in South Australia is basically a stand-alone sprinkler as it has a snap-on fitting that allows it to be connected to a hose and moved to different sectors of the garden. It also has been designed, however, to allow two, three or more sprinklers to be joined in series. Given reasonable water pressure, it is possible to water an entire

home garden lawn in one operation.

The flow-rate at normal tap pressure is five litres per minute or 300 litres an hour and is designed to deliver 25mm of water per hour over a 3.5m area. While this is low compared with a vortex sprinkler, it is considered ideal for lawns and vegetable gardens as it allows all of the water to soak into the soil.

Water is applied from the sprinkler at a low trajectory angle in relatively large droplets, significantly reducing evaporation losses often associated with traditional lawn sprinklers.

Most importantly, however, the water is distributed evenly

over the surface. Traditional sprinklers usually deliver more water in the outer circle of their distribution pattern and often much less close to the centre. These new low flow, low pressure sprinklers should be available from most garden centres, hardware and irrigation stores.

Pop-up sprinklers

If you are still watering your lawn with a pop-up sprinkler that was installed before water restrictions were introduced, it probably is time for a change.

New rotating low-flow, water-efficient sprinkler heads (Hunter, Toro) are available in South Australia but only from specialist irrigation stores (not garden centres nor hardware stores).

These spray heads only cost a few dollars.

It is a matter of removing the old heads from your existing pop-up sprinklers and with the help of converter pieces, installing the new sprinkler heads - a simple task for an irrigation consultant.

