

Irrigation

Landscaping projects of almost any size can benefit from using an integrated watering system. By **Sally Drury**

The landscape project is finished. The lawns are lush and green. The beds and borders are teeming with choice plants. And those specimen trees complete a truly perfect scene. It's a good job well done and you are proud of it. But who is going to water it?

It's a stand-off position. You can't warranty the plants because that is on the understanding that the plants will be watered and the client hasn't the time to undertake watering. And what happens with domestic clients during the summer holidays? The client is bound to take a vacation during the hottest three weeks of the year.

It's not surprising that landscape irrigation systems are becoming popular.

Increasing popularity

"Although there has been no great publicity drive, there does seem to be much more awareness about the need for irrigation," says general manager Simon Edginton of Landscape Watering Systems, based in Dinton, near Salisbury.

"Landscapers have a good general grasp of irrigation, and clients of the need for irrigation."

The planting value of many contracts is just plain scary. By comparison, the cost of irrigation is small. But while many landscapers realise that it can be costly to ignore the need for watering systems, there is the all-important question of who is going to install it. Is it something the landscape firm can do? Or is it necessary to call in a specialist irrigation contractor?



On target: head groundsman at Lord's Michael Hunt is able to use a handheld remote unit to control the Toro irrigation system accurately

LWS is an equipment-supply-only business and Edginton believes he can see the pros and cons of both.

"You need someone involved in the design to help choose the right product for the job," he says. "On a lot of jobs, it does make sense to use a specialist

landscape- or garden-irrigation company to do the job from start to finish. The irrigation company will design the scheme for you and will make sure that the pump and pipes are the right size for the job. These companies work with irrigation systems all the time, so they

know about the most suitable products, the installation methods, the sort of problems that can arise and how to deal with them."

Calling in a specialist irrigation company also means that the necessary equipment is there for the job. An irriga-

IRRIGATION FOR TURF

Although the market for landscape irrigation systems is expanding, golf and sports turf remains by far the biggest market, with more clubs and grounds choosing to use automatic watering to ease labour requirements and help provide perfect conditions for sport. Last year saw the installation of the first automatic irrigation system at the home of cricket – Lord's.

Put in as part of the ground's reconstruction, the system has a Toro Gemini PC-based control system to run the watering programme. Previously, travelling sprinklers were used and, with the clay-based soil profile, this often led to ponding.

Head groundsman Michael Hunt says: "Use of travelling sprinklers was time-consuming and invariably meant

watering at the wrong time – between matches or in the heat of the day, when evaporation is at its highest. The Gemini controller enables me to programme the watering schedule so the sprinklers come on at the optimum time, usually overnight, when it is cooler. I don't even have to be on site and it makes everything easier to plan, including the fertiliser programme."

Using a handheld radio remote controller, Hunt is able to spot-water specific areas. He says it is ideal for turf patches that need extra attention.

The irrigation system at Lord's was designed by specialist consultant Robin Hume Associates of Shrewsbury, Shropshire, and installed by irrigation contractor Lakes & Greens of Uckfield in East Sussex.



Site-specific: specialist irrigation contractors will help ensure that the equipment selection — such as the Rainbird 5000 — is suitable for the job, and they can oversee its installation

tion company will have its own trenching machine — there's no need to consider the expenditure of buying or hiring equipment and no need to search hire shops to find one with the right gear.

But the biggest advantage of calling in an irrigation company and contracting it to do the entire scheme is that someone else is responsible for the job and you then have the guarantees and

warranties on the products, installation and workmanship.

Sounds great but, as a landscaper, you might feel you need more control. You are trying to juggle the project with the weather, site conditions, suppliers, delivery schedules, availability of equipment, workforce and, of course, the needs and demands of the client. It might be difficult to tell the irrigation

contractor you will be ready for it to come on site in the third week of June. It's not easy to tie the contractor's requirements into your schedule when working with so many variables, any one of which could cause a delay.

In addition, the project needs to be of a sufficient size and value to justify irrigation contractors quoting for the work. They may not be interested in schemes to water a few metres of shrubs.

Edgington says: "The majority of landscapers will call in an irrigation contractor but more landscapers are getting involved with irrigation. The market is expanding and there are more specifications coming from landscape architects, although I think a lot of the growth across the UK is on the smaller side, where the landscaper is in a position to provide a system that the client might not otherwise afford."

The whole package

Some landscapers offer irrigation on nearly every job they do. Being able to provide for irrigation as an in-house service has the advantage that it can make a landscape business even more attractive to potential clients. And there should be profit in it, too.

However, it also means there is no reliance on a sub-contractor and that "window" when the irrigation should be installed becomes more flexible. Instead, the irrigation can be installed in phases as the planting is completed.

Edgington says: "These days, landscapers want to bring work in-house and not rely so much on other contractors. They might have one person specialising in electrics, another in the hard landscape aspect of the business and a third



High level: Hunter's nozzle for stream spray

looking after the irrigation side. Irrigation is becoming part of the company's skills mix and it means there is always someone on site who knows what is going on and knows that things are happening at the right time."

As the landscaping provider, you will have a longer involvement with the project — and it will be your name that the client remembers if something goes wrong. If you have installed the irrigation system, it is your responsibility to fix the snags, but if a contractor has installed it on your behalf, you need to track them down and get them to put right any problems that occur later."

If irrigation is to be part of the in-house service, you need to know what you are doing and be sure to choose the right products. It's no good just saying "I need a pump". Following consultation with the client, you need a design and then you have to have the right-sized pump, the correct pipes, the relevant fittings and the knowledge of how the system should be installed. ■

NEW PRODUCTS



Hunter spray nozzles

Three spray nozzles, each with its own speciality, has expanded the choice from Hunter Industries. The Multi-stream Bubbler Nozzle is installed on a pop-up sprinkler and offers improved vandal-resistance and aesthetics. It has four streams on the half-circle and eight on the full-circle. The Centre Strip nozzle has been designed to water areas that are much longer than they are wide. The 1.5m by nine-metre coverage of this nozzle can be adjusted to 25 per cent without loss of distribution. The third model — the S8-A Stream Spray — serves as a shorter-throw complement to the S16-A nozzle.



IMMS

Hunter Industries has introduced IMMS, a modular central control system designed to make large-site irrigation management and monitoring more affordable for commercial and institutional facilities. Up to 100 locations can be networked from one centralised IMMS computer and the system's modularity means additions can be made as the budget permits or needs expand. Compatible with all Hunter controllers, the IMMS system enables the watering schedules — days to water, run times, start times, rain delays, cycle and soak operations and no-water-days — and can programme lighting, fountains and water features.