Tips for winterizing a home landscape irrigation system

Parts of Oklahoma had some significant snow earlier this month, so that’s a sign it’s time to winterize your irrigation system if you haven’t already done so.

It can be tricky deciding when to tackle this task since some years we experience a very mild and dry winter that requires watering of the landscape. However, Oklahoma has been known for bone-chilling cold winters, too, but the landscape will still need a drink every now and then.

Most irrigation systems are installed below the freeze line and typically come with automatic or manual drain valves located at the lowest point of each zone, but homeowners still need to take precautions to protect their system.

First, shut off the water then turn off the automatic timer. To winterize an irrigation system, drain back-flow prevention devices and pipes exposed to freezing temperatures. If possible, wrap with insulation. If you have manual valves, open each one to drain the water from the pipes and sprinkler heads. Remember to close the valves next spring before turning on the system. If your system doesn’t feature drain valves, consider having the system retrofitted with them.

Another winterizing method for an irrigation system is to have a professional blow it out with compressed air. This isn’t something a homeowner should do on their own. If it’s done improperly, the pressure can cause damage to the system.

For those using drip tape or soaker hoses for irrigation, you’ll need to do some winterizing, too. Drain the hose and store it where it’s not exposed to sunlight. If the hose is left outside and it freezes, just leave it there – don’t move it. Wait until it has thawed to drain and store. Moving it while frozen can cause damage to the hose.

Be sure to insulate all of the above-ground parts of the sprinkler, including the main shut-off valve, plus any exposed pipes or backflow preventers.

Taking the time to properly winterize the system will help protect it through the cold winter months and ensure that it will be operational next spring when it’s needed on a regular basis.