INSTALLING AN EFFICIENT AUTOMATIC IRRIGATION SYSTEM is much more complex then the average homeowner is prepared for. Contracting with a qualified irrigation contracting business to do the job can be both complicated and intimidating. The following are some helpful guidelines to consider when hiring a qualified irrigation contracting business.

The Regional Water Providers Consortium encourages the wise use of water on our landscapes. Garden centers, nurseries, and landscape contracting businesses may be able to help you find new ways to improve the health of your landscape and use less water.

For more information regarding water efficient landscape practices, please visit the Regional Water Providers Consortium at www.conserveh2o.org, or contact your local water provider.

HOW TO SELECT AN IRRIGATION CONTRACTING BUSINESS

BE AN INFORMED CONSUMER

An irrigation system that provides maximum water efficiency may actually reduce your water bills by applying the right amount of water to your lawn, shrubs, and garden areas.

First, is the business qualified?

The business must:

- Be properly licensed, bonded, and insured as a landscape irrigation contracting business. (Check with the Landscape Contractors Board to confirm: 503-378-5909 or www.lcb.state.or.us.)
- Be able to provide current and past references with completed projects and professional qualifications.

Next, here are some tips to help you with your selection process:

- Ask if there is a fee for providing a written estimate if you do not sign with that particular company.
- Require the business to inspect the site prior to a written estimate.
- Obtain more than one written estimate based upon design features listed at the right:

Ask the contractor if they have obtained any of the following advanced certifications:

- Irrigation Association (IA): Irrigation Designer, Contractor or Auditor
- Oregon Landscape Contractors (OLCA): Certified Landscape Technician

For more information about the IA or OLCA, or their certifications, please see the following respective websites: www.irrigation.org or www.oregonlandscape.org.

Design features should:

- Include drip or micro-irrigation for flower beds, shrubs, and trees.
- Must meet all applicable building, plumbing, and local codes, including codes for backflow protection required by the State of Oregon and your water provider.
- Include a master control valve to turn off the entire irrigation system.
- Be equipped with a rain sensor if the system is not a weather-based system.
- Have each zone installed with the same brand and type of sprinkler heads to enhance efficiency.
- Have uniform coverage for spray heads and/or rotors.
- Have overlapping head to head coverage.
- Have a controller with at least the following features:
  - Capacity for adding extra zones and wiring.
  - Capacity for multiple watering cycles.
  - A water budget feature for seasonal adjustment capabilities.
- Be furnished with pressure and flow that meets equipment manufacturer's specifications.
- Address how the system will water efficiently on a slope, if applicable.
- Be designed so that lawn areas are on separate zones from flower and shrub beds.

Questions to ask the prospective irrigation contracting business include:

- How will your available water pressure and volume affect the system design?
- Where will the rain sensor be located?
- What are the ongoing maintenance concerns of the system?
- What is the life expectancy of the system?
- Will the business include soil testing and analysis in determining the system's design and specifications?

Written estimates should include:

- Whether you or the business will supply all necessary permits.
- Project completion date.
- What type of backflow protection will be used and where will it be placed? (This protects your water supply from contamination.) Some devices may require an annual test.
- What is the warranty? Are there extended warranties available, and what is the cost?
- What guarantees on labor and materials does the contractor offer?
- Installation specifications and/or diagrams detailing such things as system features, depths, and locations.
- A materials list.
- A specifications sheet.
- Price of design and installation including labor, materials, and all applicable taxes and permits.

Ask the business if any of the following additional services will be included:

- Complete written operating and maintenance instructions including the system watering schedule, recommended seasonal adjustments, and winterizing and spring reactivation instructions.
- "As-built" drawings for your records that include the layout of the system as it was installed and any handwritten changes noted on the original copies of the design.
- All manufacturer warranty information on materials with make, model, serial number, and size.
- Proof of payment for the materials used by the contractor.
- A "walk through" in which the landscape construction professional provides a demonstration of how to set watering schedules and implement recommended seasonal schedule changes.
- Any follow-up visits.

Closing the contract:

- Negotiate a clean detailed contract in writing, making sure all of your questions are answered to your satisfaction.
- Never accept verbal agreements.
- Read the entire contract and make sure you understand the terms and conditions.
- Keep a job file with copies of all documentation.

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