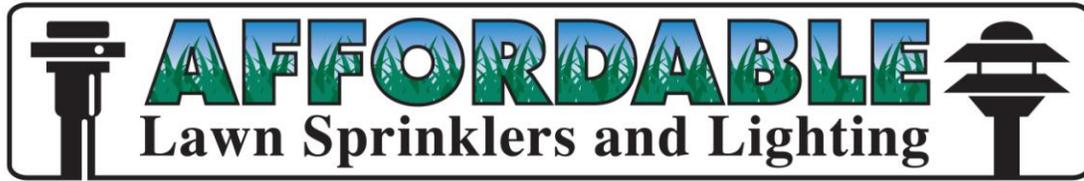


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## Contractor Checklist

	Affordable	Contractor B	Contractor C
How many customers do you have?	3600+	_____	_____
How many residential installations do you do in a year?	400+	_____	_____
Do you offer a drawing with your bid?	YES	_____	_____
Do you offer a two year warranty on your work?	YES	_____	_____
How much experience do require of your designers and supervisors?	3 YEAR	_____	_____
Can the contractor commit an English speaking project manager on-site for your project?	YES	_____	_____
Do you use day laborers?	NO	_____	_____
Can you install my control box in a convenient place for using?	YES	_____	_____
Do you carry workman's compensation on all your employees?	YES	_____	_____
Do you employ someone to answer your phones?	YES	_____	_____
Can you offer references in my area for Sprinklers & Lighting?	YES	_____	_____
How many full time service techs/install crews do you employ?	10+2 Install Crews	_____	_____
Do you offer the spring turn-on and winterization service?	YES	_____	_____
Do you have an extended warranty program?	YES	_____	_____
Do you have a comprehensive general liability insurance policy?	YES	_____	_____
Do you use a vibratory plow?	YES	_____	_____
Are you a part of the Virginia Irrigation Association?	YES	_____	_____
Do you use 12" spray heads for my front landscaping?	YES	_____	_____
Will the plumbing work inside be done in copper?	YES	_____	_____

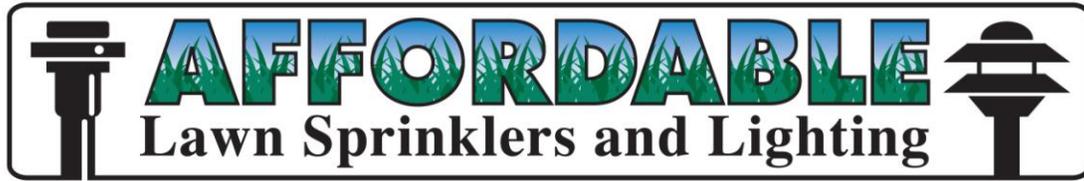


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## Top 10 ways irrigation contractors save you money in the short run.

Every year, we meet with over a 1000 potential customers and receive the same questions "How come this contractor is cheaper?" "Do we have to be home?" "Can you leave a quote in the mailbox?" "How do I compare quotes apples to apples?" Therefore, I have put together a list of things some contractors do to save money. The difference between a "tornado chaser or garage slammer" and a well established company can be significant, up to 25% difference in price! But, you are shopping for a custom built irrigation system, not a television from Best Buy, it has over 75 different parts we hand build in harsh soil conditions and it will be subject to many years of harsh weather conditions! If you want a good experience and a quality product that will last a long time, it is worth the extra money. Ironically, it is often the contractors with the cheapest prices that make the most money and it isn't from volume, it is from cutting corners. Affordable Lawn Sprinklers stands proud behind our product, so proud we put a two year warranty behind all of our installers!

1. Install sprinkler valves in different locations throughout the property (save \$100)- Even on smaller irrigation systems, this can save a \$100 in underground piping and labor. The problem is the valves are necessary for yearly maintenance and if the sprinkler technician cannot easily find your valves than it makes it difficult to properly service your system and will cost you more money down the road.
2. Hire Sub-Contractors to conduct the installation (save \$150)- The savings on sub-contractor work is huge but so are the risks. In general, labor cost 20-25% of a sprinkler system. By utilizing subs, one can easily save 5% (on a \$3,000 job that would be \$150). By Virginia law, if an employee reports to a specific company for work regularly, the worker must be an employee. This means an additional employee payroll tax of 7.5% and also 5% for workers compensation insurance. The homeowners risk is the consistency and quality of the work since sub-contractors frequently hire the cheapest labor. Also, if an employee gets hurt at the residence and there is no workers compensation insurance, the homeowner could be at substantial risk.
3. Avoid hiring an office manager (save \$50-75)- Remember the saying of a small restaurant owner "I seat the patrons, cook the food, wash the dishes, etc"? Well that doesn't work for the irrigation business. The office manager is the person that makes or breaks your customer experience. They answer your initial sales call questions, schedule your project, call your utilities, troubleshoot your sprinkler system problems, etc. But unfortunately, they don't work for free, not even in the winter. In general, it cost about \$50-75 additional dollar per sprinkler project, but you are going to be glad in the long run when you run into a problem with your system and they answer the phone and immediately schedule a service call.
4. Avoid having experienced service technicians (save \$100)- Experienced service technicians are very expensive, particularly in a seasonal business where there isn't service work from mid-December till the beginning of April. On average, most irrigation companies offer a 2 year warranty, but the warranty is only as good as the company's reputation. I don't care what any company says, they can be the best installer in the world, but every system will need something fixed within that warranty period. To obtain a great long term customer experience, you need a company that answers your service call and schedules an experienced technician to conduct your warranty work because if they don't, you are going to have to pay hundreds of dollars to find another company to come to your property and fix your problem because it will probably be a system full of "cut corners".
5. Hand dig a sprinkler system (save \$100)- The best way to install a sprinkler system in Northern Virginia is use a vibratory plow that costs \$30,000. It ensures the sprinkler pipes are deep enough (6-10") and doesn't damage your property. Every year, we run across companies that hand dig sprinkler systems and it looks as if the property has been infested by a pack of moles. Although this drops your price by a minimum of \$100, the damage is irreversible and your property's grading will never be the same.
6. Install too many sprinkler heads per zone (save \$300-700)- Sprinkler systems are driven by hydraulics (water flow and pressure). In general, you can install 5 rotors or 8 sprays per zone to have the sprinkler system work properly. One way for a contractor to save hundreds of dollars is to install more heads per



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- zone to reduce the system by one or two zones. The problem is the pressure will drop considerably and it will not water properly your lawn vs plants. This will mean that you will find dry spots in your grass and some of your plants will die from lack of water. Making matters worse, adding an additional zone later will cost you three times as much because a contractor will have to take apart your current system and add the additional zones by hand.
7. Install a cheap control box where the customer already has an electrical outlet (save \$80)- Like most manufacturers, sprinkler manufacturers such as Rainbird, Hunter and Toro make different lines of control boxes. From the entry level to the professional grade, the difference is about \$50. The major difference is the ability to add additional zones on the control box, quality of the circuitry (cheaper boxes don't tend to hold up as well with time), flexibility in the programming (ability to water the plants differently from the grass or watering your over seeded property twice a day). Lastly, we have found our customers generally like to have their control box installed near the entrance of the garage where they can quickly assess their control box. Often times, there is not an outlet there so we purchase \$30 in extension plugs and connect it to the outlet in their ceiling. The benefit is: saves you an electrical outlet and it allows you and our technicians to access your box easier.
  8. Not run extra electrical wire to the valve boxes (save \$50)- In 99% of all installations, the valve box is installed on the opposite side of the house from the garage. In order to get the control box in your garage to talk to the valves, we install a rubber conduit in the ground that holds multiple wires, one for each valve. We generally run at least 2 extras wire in our conduit for future convenience. It costs us about \$50 but will save you hundreds of dollars in the future if one of your wires goes bad or you wish to add an additional zone. Plus we don't need to drill another hole out of your garage nor dig up your property again to install a new wire; it is already sitting in the valve box for easy replacement or expansion.
  9. Not provide a drawing with your estimate (save \$50)- Time is money but we feel providing our potential customers with a drawing of the sprinkler design is well worth the expense. It is the best way to ensure there will be no surprises the day of the job. I personally would **never** buy a system from a company without a design and that is why we choose to provide one.
  10. Avoid having a project manager onsite (save \$150)- A good project manager will ensure you have a great customer experience. They are responsible for getting your project properly completed in a timely manner. They stock the vehicle with the right parts, review the design with the customer, oversee the employees installing the system, and do the final check on the system to make sure everything is working properly.

## Frequently asked Questions

### How long have you been in business?

We incorporated in January 2002.

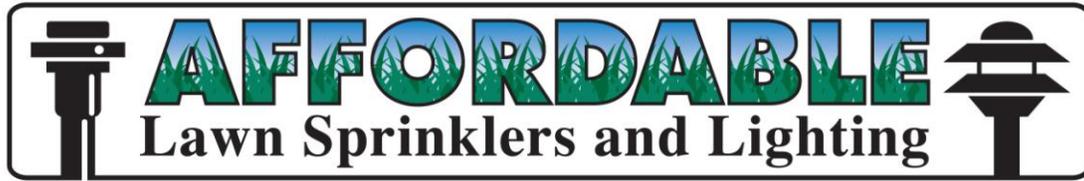
### How many customers do you have?

We have installed and maintain over 3600 customers.

### How should I go about getting quotes for a sprinkler system?

Research, research, research. I receive dozens of phone calls a year from potential customers who ask if I can leave a quote in their mailbox and I decline. We pride ourselves on providing a great experience from the very first phone call to our first meeting to design your system. We strive to build a customer base of homeowners who value quality versus cheap price. Our customers demand great service. If you want professional service from start to finish, you can't expect it from the lowest bidder. If you are looking for a great experience, you need to take the time with each bidder and understand the following:

- Is their design well thought out – the designer should be asking questions such as, "Do you want to water the entire property", "Do you want to water your front yard a different amount of time than the back and/or side", "Do you want to water your shrubs the same amount of time as your grass".



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- Reliable scheduling – you should evaluate how important it is for the contractor to begin and finish the project in a timely fashion. The most common complaint in the contractor business is delays. You should expect your project to be finished in 1 day if your property is less than one acre.
- Professional supervision – you are paying a company a significant amount of money to do a professional job. It is important the chosen contractor employs both a professional project manager and experienced employees.
- Responsive service – you need to find a company that stands behind its product and will service your needs in a professional way.

Contrary to popular belief, things such as the “brand of the parts” or “number of zones” are the least important factor in choosing a contractor. You need to find a professional contractor who will provide you with the best value, not price.

#### **Will your estimate provide a drawing of my sprinkler design?**

Yes, our sales representatives have been through a thorough training program to ensure our customers get the right design for their property. We provide a hand drawn design for all of our potential customers so they can visualize their system before they invest a penny. Customers should request this from each contractor. Here are some things you should look for:

- a. How far apart are the sprinkler heads spaced? (Does the system provide head to head coverage?)
- b. How many rotor and spray heads per zone?
- c. Where are you going to install the valve boxes?
- d. Are the valves going to be protected by a Green protective box for easy access in the future?

#### **What will my yard look like after the installation?**

We tell our customer to expect blemishes in their property to be visible for 4-6 weeks depending on the time of year. In areas like Loudon County, where soil content tends to be rocky, customers should expect to end up with some uneven spots. We recommend customers to purchase bags of topsoil and grass seed ahead of time. We will backfill and reseed the areas we worked in that created noticeable blemishes. Make sure you purchase a high quality bag of grass seed that is consistent with the grass you currently have. Also during the dry hot months of summer, we recommend our customers to water their yards prior to the installation (this softens the dirt and permits the machine to put the pipe in the yard easier).

#### **Do you have a full time service technician?**

Yes, we have 10 full time employees dedicated solely to providing outstanding service. We believe having a full-time service technician is essential to providing outstanding customer service. This is something many companies can't offer and you will see a dramatic difference in the quality of service. Lawn sprinkler systems are put through rigorous wear and tear. Most systems are in use over 400 hours per year. They are exposed to the natural elements (heavy rainfalls, extreme heat, freezing cold, etc). In addition, most customers landscaping plans change over time so it is important to choose a company that documents the layout of your system so they can send the service tech with the right supplies and tools to properly alter your system as your landscaping requires. Providing outstanding customer service is our commitment to you.

#### **Do you have an office manager?**

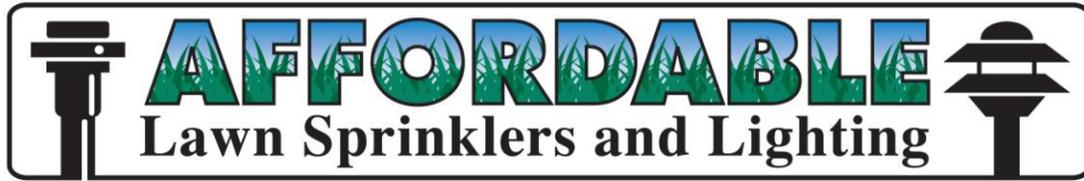
Yes. Along with our office manager we also have 4 full time employees for service & installation scheduling, questions etc...

#### **Do you carry insurance and is that important?**

Yes, we have a very comprehensive insurance program. We have the following insurance protection:

- General Liability (covered up to \$1,000,000)
- Workers Compensation on every employee
- Auto Insurance

Unfortunately, there are some lawn sprinkler companies that do not carry insurance and the risk is transferred to the owner should any problem arise or if an employee is hurt. We highly recommend you validate they carry a comprehensive insurance program.



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**Do you offer a warranty?**

Yes, We offer a two year parts & labor warranty and a 5 year warranty on all piping installed from the installation date.

**Do you offer an extended warranty?**

Yes.

**How much will a lawn sprinkler system cost?**

It is difficult to give you an exact price for your project without meeting with you personally and reviewing your properties needs. Here are a few things that can affect your pricing: shape of your property (squares and rectangles are cheaper than pipe stems and trapezoids), amount of landscaping, terrain (rocky soil or areas with a large number of tree roots), and hardscaping (driveways, patios, walkways).

**How do I prevent my system from watering in the rain?**

We can install a rain sensor to your lawn sprinkler system. This device will deactivate your sprinkler system after 1/2 inch of rainfall.

**What is a backflow preventer?**

A backflow preventer's purpose is to protect your house water from the possible contaminants from your lawn. Think of the how an inflatable raft works, you can blow air in, but no air can escape. The backflow works the same way, water can feed into your sprinkler system, but it cannot return back to your drinking water. This is a required device for ALL installations in Northern Virginia.

**Poly Pipe vs. PVC**

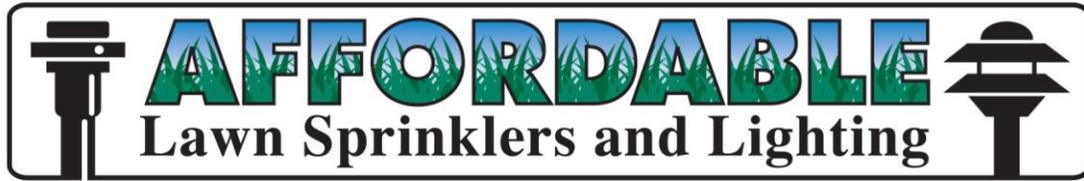
Although you will find a mixture of companies using both types of material in the Northern Virginia area, we feel Poly Pipe is a superior product. Poly pipe is a more flexible pipe that expands and contracts during the winter & cold times throughout the year. PVC is recommended for warmer areas such as Florida, Georgia, California, etc. Poly Pipe is recommended for areas susceptible to long freezes. If you go to Texas, you will find all companies using PVC. If you go to Pennsylvania, you will find all companies using Poly Pipe. Northern Virginia is in the middle and that is why you find a mixture of both poly & pvc. However many companies we are starting to see they are changing over to poly systems vs pvc systems due to this reason. We also double clamp all our connections to prevent possible leakage.

**Rainbird vs Hunter**

This has been a hot topic for debate for many years, very similar to trying to decide whether Bud Light taste better than Miller Light, truth is most people could never tell the difference if you hid the sprinkler device from view. We feel both companies offer great products, this is why we are willing to customize your order. Often the quality level is more important than the brand name and both companies have different quality products. Think of Toyota, they manufacture the Tercel, Camry and Avalon. Make sure you are always getting the highest quality parts from both companies.

**Will the water from my landscaping spray heads, hit the foundation of my house?**

This is another area we are very unique. We stagger are spray heads (some heads in front of the bed facing the house and other heads at the base of the house spraying away) for two reasons: 1) It eliminates water shadowing (where plants/shrubs block water from hitting other plants) and 2) It reduces the amount of overspray on the foundation of your house. Typically, it will increase the cost of the total system, but it is the best application for your landscaping today and tomorrow. Nothing is worse than returning from a summer vacation and finding expensive landscaping dead from lack of water.



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#### **What is the recommended watering schedule?**

Without knowing your property, it is difficult to recommend the perfect watering schedule for everyone. But here is good starting point:

- a. Calculate the total time needed to water your entire property (take a sheet of paper, write down the time you will be watering each zone, add up the total time)
- b. Evaluate what time your family begins using the water source in the morning (showers, dishwasher, laundry machine, etc). Take this time, subtract the total time needed to water your lawn and there is your recommended water time for your residence. We don't recommend watering at night due to the possibility of getting fungus.
- c. We recommend watering spray zones less minutes per week than rotors due to the constant water flow on spray. During the fall and spring, we recommend watering shrubs 2 x's per week for 5-10 minutes, during the peak of summer, try watering a little bit longer.
- d. For rotors, we recommend watering in the fall and spring 2-3x's per week for 15-25 minutes. During the summer, you should probably add 20-30 more minutes for each watering session.

Please note, these are only recommended watering times, the best way to ensure the best program is to closely monitor your plants and lawn. If you find your plants and lawn starting to dry out or brown, you should add minutes. If you find your lawn to be really mushy and soggy, turn the watering time down. If you have a professional lawn care company, we would recommend asking them to offer you a recommended water solution for your property.

#### **How much maintenance is required with a sprinkler system?**

Maintenance is important to ensure the system continually runs smooth. The most important service is the Fall Turn Off and the Spring Turn On. In the fall, we are available to blow all the water out of the system to eliminate the risk of freezing pipes over the winter months. We also remove any pieces that have the potential to freeze and crack which includes the backflow preventer. In the spring, we turn the system back on, evaluate each zone, adjust heads, reinstall backflow preventer and reset the control box. Please check out our service section for details on our Annual Service Agreement.

#### **Will an automatic sprinkler system use more water than I'm currently using?**

Well that depends if you are currently watering your lawn and shrubs. If you are, then no. Many customers have found decreases in their water bill after installing a lawn sprinkler system.

#### **Should I install a separate water meter for my sprinkler system?**

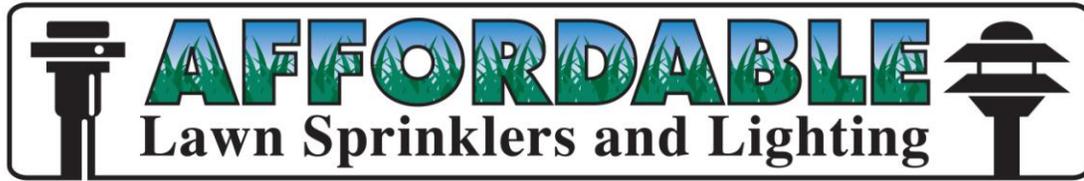
If you are a resident in Northern Virginia then you will not need a separate meter for your lawn sprinkler system. The water authorities in Northern Virginia use your average water sewage rate during winter months and apply this rate for your summer months. This is a logical solution to avoid having to pay sewage for the water you use outside your home during the warmer months.

#### **Does having a sprinkler system really save time?**

Yes. You won't have to spend another minute of your valuable leisure time watering the lawn. Your new system will do all the watering for you - even when you're away from home.

#### **Will you know where my underground utilities are located?**

Before we begin working on any property, we will contact Ms Utility of Virginia 72 hours before we begin your project to mark the following utility lines: **water line** will be marked in blue, **gas** will be marked in yellow, **power** will be marked in red, and **cable and phone** will be marked in orange. Typically, the cable and phone lines are the only shallow utility lines, they are often only 2-3" deep in the ground. As a measure of precaution from hitting your cable or phone lines, we will hand dig around all utility lines. But, there are **no guarantees** that you phone or cable line won't be damaged. There is no way to guarantee that the line was accurately marked or we won't hit the line hand digging with a pick and shovel. If a utility line is hit, our project manager will promptly inform you and instruct you on how to resolve the issue. Typically the cable and phone companies are very reactive in providing great service and schedule a service tech to your property right away and do not charge a fee.



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## Step by step process from contract to installation

Getting a sprinkler system can be a big decision. Our goal at Affordable Lawn Sprinkler and Lighting is that the process goes as smoothly as possible with minimal surprises. This sheet is to provide you with a step by step process from sprinkler estimate to final walkthrough.

### Step 1: Setting up a time to get an estimate.

This part is easy, just call us at 703-289-1155 and ask for the sales department. We recommend reserving at least an hour for your sprinkler estimate.

### Step 2: The day of your design and estimate.

Plumbing: We begin every estimate with identifying where will be receiving our main water source. Unfortunately, it is not as simple as connecting to your existing hose bibs. Lawn Sprinkler systems need lots of water so we need to connect to a main water line. Typically we connect in one of two places, in your front yard at the water meter in the ground or in your basement (generally your furnace room). Lastly we identify where to install your backflow preventer which will protect your drinking water.

Property Lines: Next we will need for you to determine your property lines.

Affordable Lawn Sprinkler Design: Now relax while our designer works on your own customized design. He or she will hand draw a sketch of your property indicating your house, driveway, walkways, patios, etc as landmarks.

Review design: After our designer has finished your design, he or she will review the drawing with you to ensure it is exactly what you want. This is an opportunity to add/change/or review sprinkler heads and/or zones.

**Step 3: Signing up** When you want to move forward with getting your lawn sprinkler system, we need you to do the following: 1) Double check your name, address and phone numbers to ensure we have the correct information 2) Review and indicate if you want any additional options 3) Sign at the bottom of contract and mail with a deposit to our office at 133 Patrick Street SE Vienna VA 22180.

**Step 4: Scheduling** Our typically waiting period from contract to installation is 3-5 weeks. When it is your turn, our sales/install manager will call you to schedule your installation (typically one week prior to your installation). Next, we will call Ms. Utility of Virginia to mark your public utility lines.

**Step 5: Installation Day** The morning of your installation, your sales representative or supervisor will place flags where every rotor and spray heads will be installed. Next he or she will review the following: location of the control box, valve boxes, and sprinkler heads. Once you given your approval, you installation will begin. Any additional changes after this point will be charged Time and Material. It is also important you identify such things as underground dog fences, drainage, sump pumps, french drains, and electrical lines. Lastly, if you have topsoil and/or grass seed, please provide it to your supervisor so they can apply in the necessary areas. ***Due to the large varieties of grass seed, we only spread grass seed provided by the homeowner.***

**Step 6: Walk Through of System** After your sprinkler installation has been completed, we will review the entire system with you. You will be shown the following:

- Control Box: we will show you how to set the date and time, watering times and recommended watering schedules
- Emergency shut off valve: this will turn **all** water to your system
- Adjusting spray and rotor heads: you can adjust distance and rotation for your heads
- Review of valve boxes etc



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**Step 7: Collecting payment** In order to pay our employees and vendors in a timely fashion, we need to collect a check when we finish your walkthrough. After 14 days past your installation day, we reserve the right to charge a late fee.