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Smart Sprinklers

Rachio, Rain Bird and B-hyve controllers and hose timers — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for homeowners and families

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For Rachio, Rain Bird & Orbit B-hyve · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to smart sprinkler controllers and hose timers: what they do, whether one fits your system, how to set it up, and how to look after it through a Northeast Ohio year — from spring startup to the fall blow-out. Read it in any order and at your own pace. Every setting comes with what it actually does *for you*, and slow, step-by-step directions. Apps change their menus from time to time, so when a button has moved, look for the same words nearby.

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PART 1

Getting Started

What a smart sprinkler controller really is, what it can and can't do for your lawn and garden, and the handful of words you'll see in every app. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If you've ever come home in a downpour to find the sprinklers running, or wondered what all those buttons on the gray box in the garage actually do, this guide is for **you**. A smart sprinkler controller is simply a sprinkler timer that connects to your Wi-Fi, checks the weather, and lets you run things from your phone.

I'm Bill. I've spent more than 30 years working with technology, and these days I help families here in Portage County feel at home with theirs. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it standing next to you in the garage: patiently, in plain English, and without trying to sell you anything.

What this guide will do for you

- Explain, in plain words, what a smart controller does — and what it doesn't.
- Help you decide whether one will fit the sprinkler system you already have.
- Walk you through the three brands you'll see most: **Rachio**, **Rain Bird** and **Orbit B-hyve**.
- Show you how to set up zones, schedules and weather skips so the lawn gets what it needs and no more.
- Get you through a Northeast Ohio year: spring startup, summer, and the fall shutdown before freezing weather.
- Offer a simple option — a smart hose timer — for homes without an in-ground system.
- Help you fix the two most common problems: a controller that's offline, and a zone that won't run.

The big promise: you can't break anything

Almost everything in this guide happens in an app, and every app setting can be changed back. If a schedule waters too much, you shorten it. If a zone is named wrong, you rename it. The few jobs that really can cause trouble — digging up valves, adding wires, or blowing out the pipes with compressed air — I'll flag clearly as jobs for an irrigation professional.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

A sprinkler that skips watering when it has just rained, and waters a little less in cool weather, saves water, saves money on your water bill, and is kinder to the lawn. Once it's set up, it mostly runs itself.

STAY SAFE

Two kinds of electricity

Sprinkler valves run on low-voltage power (about 24 volts) — the thin colored wires. The controller itself plugs into, or is wired to, ordinary household power. The low-voltage side is safe for a careful homeowner. Anything involving household wiring is a job for an electrician. Chapter 8 explains where the line is.

And I'm only a phone call away

If anything here leaves you unsure, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. There's no such thing as a silly question.

Let's start with what a smart controller actually does.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What a Smart Sprinkler Controller Does

Every in-ground sprinkler system has a **controller** — often called the timer or the clock. It's the box, usually in the garage or basement, with a set of thin wires running out to the yard. When it's time to water, it sends a little electricity down one wire, a valve opens, and one section of the yard waters. A **smart** controller does the same job, with three big additions.

The three big differences

1. **It's on your Wi-Fi.** You can see and change everything from an app on your phone or tablet, from the kitchen table or from the other side of the country.
2. **It watches the weather.** It looks at local forecasts and weather data and can skip watering when it has rained, when rain is coming, when it's windy, or when it's near freezing.
3. **It adjusts for the season.** It can water less in the cool, damp weeks of spring and fall and more in the heat of July, without you touching a thing.

What it can't do

- It can't fix a broken sprinkler head, a leaking valve or a cut wire. It can only send the signal.
- It can't water a spot the sprinklers don't reach.
- It can't protect the pipes from freezing. In Northeast Ohio, the system still needs to be shut off and blown out every fall (Chapter 18).
- It needs your Wi-Fi to reach the garage or the side of the house. Chapter 5 covers that.

Who has one?

More people than you might think. In a 2026 Reviews.org survey of 1,000 U.S. adults about the smart devices in their homes, 11% said they had a smart sprinkler or irrigation system.

And if you don't have in-ground sprinklers

You can still get most of the benefits. A **smart hose timer** screws onto an outdoor faucet, runs a garden hose or soaker hose on a schedule, and can be controlled from your phone. Chapter 21 covers them.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

No more running outside to turn off the sprinklers when the sky opens up, and no more guessing whether the timer is still set for June in September. You can check on things from your phone whenever you like.

CHAPTER 3

The Words You'll See

Sprinkler apps and installation guides use a handful of words over and over. Here they are in plain English. You don't have to memorize them — come back here whenever one puzzles you.

Word	What it means
Controller / timer / clock	The box that decides when each part of the yard gets watered.
Zone / station	One section of the yard that waters together, controlled by one valve. Rain Bird and Orbit often say **station**; Rachio says **zone**. Same thing.
Valve	An electric gate, usually buried in a small green box in the yard, that opens to let water into one zone.
24V AC	The low-voltage power that opens sprinkler valves. Almost all home systems use it.
Common wire	The one shared wire, often white, that goes to every valve. It connects to the terminal marked **C** or **COM**.
Zone wires	One wire per zone, each a different color, connected to numbered terminals.
Master valve	An extra valve on some systems that opens whenever any zone runs. Usually wired to a terminal marked **M** or **MV**.
Pump start relay	A switch that turns on a well pump or booster pump when watering starts. Also usually wired to the **M** terminal.
Backflow preventer	A safety device on the water line that keeps lawn water from flowing back into your drinking water. A plumbing part — a job for a pro.
Rain sensor	A small gadget on the gutter or fence that tells some controllers to pause when it rains. Smart controllers can often use weather data instead.
Run time	How many minutes a zone waters each time.
Cycle and soak	Splitting one long watering into shorter bursts with a pause between, so water soaks in instead of running off.
Seasonal adjust	Turning all run times up or down by a percentage for the time of year.
Blow-out / winterizing	Clearing the water out of the pipes with compressed air before the ground freezes.

GOOD TO KNOW

Same idea, different names

Rachio has **Fixed** and **Flex Daily** schedules. Rain Bird has **programs** with **Seasonal Adjust**. B-hyve has **programs** and **Smart Watering**. They all do the same two things: a set timetable, or a timetable that adjusts itself to the weather.

PART 2

Before You Buy

Will a smart controller fit the system you have? Will your Wi-Fi reach it? Which brand, and are there rebates? Plus an honest look at what you can do yourself and what needs an irrigation pro.

CHAPTER 4

Will It Fit My System?

Most home sprinkler systems in this country work the same basic way, so most smart controllers will fit. But it's worth five minutes in the garage to check before you buy. Take your phone and a flashlight.

Look at your old controller

1. Find the controller. It's usually on a garage or basement wall, sometimes outside on the house.
2. Open the front cover or the wiring door. You'll see a row of screw terminals or push-in clips with thin colored wires.
3. **Take a clear photo** of the wires before you touch anything. This one photo can save you an hour later.
4. Count the zone wires connected to numbered terminals (1, 2, 3 and so on). That's how many zones you use today.
5. Look for a wire on a terminal marked **C** or **COM** — the common wire.
6. Look for a wire on a terminal marked **M**, **MV** or **P/MV**. If there is one, your system has a master valve or a pump.
7. Check how the controller gets power: a plug-in transformer (a small block on an outlet), or wired straight into the wall.

The four questions

Question	What to look for
How many zones?	Buy a controller with at least as many zones as you use today. Rachio comes in 8- and 16-zone models; Rain Bird's ARC8 has 8; the B-hyve XR comes in 8 and 16.
Are the valves 24V AC?	Nearly all home systems are. If your old controller says 24VAC on its label or transformer, you're fine. Battery-powered valve boxes with no controller in the house are a different kind of system.
Is there a master valve or pump?	Smart controllers can usually run one, using the M terminal. You'll tell the app during setup. A well pump makes the job a bit more involved (see the warning below).
How is it powered?	Plug-in controllers are the easy swap. A controller wired into household power, or mounted outside, may need an electrician or an outdoor-rated model.

HEADS UP

Pumps need extra care

If your system runs from a well or booster pump through a pump start relay, a wiring mistake can run the pump with no zone open, which can overheat it. Rain Bird's own winterizing advice specifically warns about pumps starting by accident. If you have a pump, it's worth having a pro or a knowledgeable helper check the setup.

TIP

Write it down

Note your zone count, which zone waters what, and whether you have an M wire, on the cheat-sheet in Chapter 28. You'll need it at setup.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Five minutes with a flashlight tells you whether a smart controller is a simple swap or a job for a pro — before you spend any money.

CHAPTER 5

Wi-Fi Out in the Garage

A smart controller is only smart while it's online. Garages, basements and the outside walls of a house are often the weakest Wi-Fi spots in the home. Check yours before you buy.

Test the signal where the controller will go

1. Stand right where the controller will hang, with your phone.
2. Turn off cell data for a moment (or just watch the Wi-Fi symbol) so you know the phone is using Wi-Fi.
3. Look at the Wi-Fi bars, then try playing a short video.
4. If the video plays smoothly, you're probably fine. If it stalls or the bars drop to one, plan to improve the signal first.

Use the 2.4 GHz band

Most home routers send out two kinds of Wi-Fi: **2.4 GHz**, which reaches farther and through walls better, and **5 GHz**, which is faster but shorter-range. Sprinkler controllers are a good fit for 2.4 GHz. Rain Bird's LNK2 Wi-Fi module and Rachio's Smart Hose Timer work only on 2.4 GHz. Rachio recommends 2.4 GHz for its controllers. The B-hyve XR can use either band.

> **TIP**
>
> **If the two bands share one name**
>
> Many routers combine both bands under one network name. That usually works. If a controller has trouble joining, some routers let you split the bands into two names for a while, or turn on a temporary 2.4 GHz-only mode during setup.

If the signal is weak

- Move the router toward that side of the house, if you can.
- Add a **mesh** Wi-Fi point or extender in a room near the garage.
- For a detached garage or barn, see Bill's guide on Wi-Fi to the garage and barn.
- Mount the controller on the inside of the garage wall that faces the house, rather than the far wall.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A strong signal is the difference between a controller that quietly does its job and one that keeps dropping offline. Fixing Wi-Fi first saves a lot of frustration later.

CHAPTER 6

Choosing a Brand: Rachio, Rain Bird or B-hyve

All three brands make good controllers, and all three use a free app. Here's an honest side-by-side. Prices are list prices on each company's own store as of November 2026; sales are common, and hardware stores may charge differently.

	Rachio 3	Rain Bird ARC8	Orbit B-hyve XR
Zones	8 or 16	8	8 or 16
List price	$199.99 (8) · $249.99 (16)	About $123–$150	$169.99 (8) · $199.99 (16)
App	Rachio app	Rain Bird 2.0 app	B-hyve app
Weather	Weather Intelligence Plus	Forecast rain delay, Seasonal Adjust	Smart Watering, weather delays
Wi-Fi	2.4 GHz recommended	Built in	2.4 or 5 GHz, plus Bluetooth
Voice	Alexa, Google Assistant	Alexa, Google Assistant	Alexa, Google
Monthly fee	None	None found	None found

Rachio

The Rachio 3 is sold in 8-zone and 16-zone versions. Its **Weather Intelligence Plus** uses satellite, radar and weather-station data to decide when to skip. Rachio describes the app as free and the controller as having **no monthly fees**. Rachio also makes a battery-powered **Smart Hose Timer** (Chapter 21).

Rain Bird

Rain Bird is a long-established irrigation company. The **ARC8** is an 8-zone controller with Wi-Fi built in, for indoor or outdoor mounting, and runs in the **Rain Bird 2.0** app. Rain Bird says it meets EPA WaterSense criteria. If you already have a Rain Bird ESP-TM2, ESP-ME3 or similar controller with a Wi-Fi symbol on the front, you may not need a new controller at all: the **LNK2 Wi-Fi module** plugs into it and makes it smart ($80.00 on Rain Bird's store as of November 2026).

Orbit B-hyve

Orbit's B-hyve line includes the **B-hyve XR** indoor/outdoor controller (8 or 16 stations) and a family of **B-hyve XD** hose faucet timers. The XR has a color display on the unit itself, four programs, rain delay, and works with Google and Alexa. Orbit is now part of Husqvarna, so some B-hyve help pages live on Husqvarna's website.

GOOD TO KNOW

Apple Home users

If you run your home with Apple's Home app, check each company's current list of integrations before you buy. I couldn't confirm current Apple Home support for these controllers, so this guide doesn't promise it.

TIP

Bill's honest take

Any of the three will do the job. Pick the one whose zone count fits, whose app you like the look of, and — if you have an existing Rain Bird with a Wi-Fi symbol — consider the LNK2 module before replacing a perfectly good controller.

CHAPTER 7

Rebates & WaterSense

Some water utilities help pay for a smart controller, because it saves water. The key words to look for are **WaterSense labeled**.

What WaterSense means

WaterSense is a program run by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Products that meet its standards carry a WaterSense label. The EPA says properly installed WaterSense labeled irrigation controllers can reduce irrigation water use by 15 to 30 percent.

Check whether a model is labeled

1. On a computer or phone, go to **lookforwatersense.epa.gov**.
2. Choose the search for **Weather-Based Irrigation Controllers**.
3. Search by brand or model name.
4. If your model is listed, note the exact model number — rebate forms usually ask for it.

Look for a rebate

1. Go to the EPA's **WaterSense Rebate Finder** at **epa.gov/watersense/rebate-finder**.
2. Search for your area.
3. Also check your own water provider's website, or call the number on your water bill, and ask whether they offer a rebate for a WaterSense labeled irrigation controller.
4. If there is one, read the rules *before* you buy: some require pre-approval, a specific model, or professional installation.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> **The EPA doesn't pay rebates itself**
>
> The EPA says WaterSense provides rebate information but no rebates of its own. Rebates come from local water providers, and many areas don't have one. I haven't confirmed any rebate for Portage County, so don't count on one — but it costs nothing to ask.

SCAM ALERT

Rebate offers you didn't ask for

A caller or website that promises a "water department rebate" if you pay a fee or give a card number is not your water department. Real rebates are listed on your utility's own website and never cost you money to claim.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A few minutes of checking might take some money off the price — and a WaterSense labeled controller is designed to keep saving water on every bill after that.

CHAPTER 8

Do It Yourself, or Call an Irrigation Pro?

Here's the honest line. Swapping one controller for another, on the low-voltage side, is a job many careful homeowners do themselves in under an hour. The plumbing and the wiring in the yard are a different story.

Usually fine to do yourself

- Swapping a plug-in controller for a smart one, moving the existing thin wires from the old terminals to the same terminals on the new one.
- Plugging a Rain Bird LNK2 module into a compatible controller.
- Setting up the app, zones, schedules and weather skips.
- Putting a hose timer on an outdoor faucet.

Call an irrigation professional for

- **Valves** — replacing, adding, or digging up a valve box.
- **Backflow preventers** — these protect your drinking water, and testing or repair may need a licensed or certified person depending on local rules.
- **New wiring** to the yard, or finding a cut wire underground.
- **Adding zones** or moving sprinkler heads.
- **The fall blow-out** with compressed air (Chapter 18).
- **Pump systems**, if you're not sure how yours is wired.

Call an electrician for

- A controller wired directly into household power instead of plugging in.
- Adding a new outlet near where the controller will go, especially outdoors.

STAY SAFE

Household power is not a DIY job

The thin sprinkler wires carry about 24 volts — enough to tingle, not to hurt. The power feeding the controller is ordinary household voltage, which can. If the old controller has no plug, or you see wires bigger than the sprinkler wires going into it, stop and call an electrician.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the line keeps you safe and saves money: do the easy, low-voltage part yourself, and pay a pro only for the parts that really need one.

PART 3

Installing & Setting Up

Moving the wires from the old timer to the new one, then getting each brand's app talking to your controller.

CHAPTER 9

Swapping the Old Timer for a Smart One

This is the one hands-on job in the guide. Take it slowly, and remember the golden rule: **photograph and label before you unscrew anything.** Every brand includes its own instructions and labels in the box, and the app walks you through it too — follow those where they differ from this outline.

What you'll need

- Your phone, with the brand's app installed and your Wi-Fi password handy.
- A small screwdriver.
- Masking tape and a pen, or the wire labels that come in the box.
- A flashlight.
- A drill and screws, if the new controller hangs in a different spot.

Step by step

1. Take a clear photo of the old controller's wiring, close enough to read the terminal labels.
2. **Unplug the old controller** from the outlet. If it has no plug, stop here and see Chapter 8.
3. Label each wire with the terminal it's connected to: C, 1, 2, 3, M and so on.
4. Loosen each screw and gently pull the wires out. Leave the labels on.
5. Take the old controller off the wall. Mount the new one, or its mounting plate, at a comfortable height near the outlet.
6. Connect the **common** wire to the new controller's **C** terminal.
7. Connect each zone wire to the same-numbered terminal on the new controller.
8. If you had an **M** wire, connect it to the new controller's M (master valve or pump) terminal.
9. If you had a wired rain sensor, check the new controller's instructions — some have sensor terminals; with weather data you may not need it.
10. Plug the new controller in, and open the app to finish setup (Chapters 10 to 12).

TIP

Two wires in one terminal

It's normal to find two or more wires under the C terminal, or a jumper wire. Move them together, exactly as they were. If anything looks unusual, stop and take a photo — it's a quick question for a pro or for me.

HEADS UP

Mount it out of the rain

Indoor-only controllers belong inside the garage or basement. If yours will hang outside, make sure it's an indoor/outdoor model and that the outlet is weatherproof. Rain Bird sells the ARC8, and Orbit the B-hyve XR, as indoor/outdoor; check the box for your model.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With good labels and one photo, putting the old controller back takes ten minutes if anything goes wrong. You really can't lose your place.

CHAPTER 10

Setting Up a Rachio Controller

The Rachio app walks you through every step, including the wiring, so keep your phone with you at the controller.

Getting connected

1. Download the free **Rachio** app from the App Store or Google Play and create an account.
2. Tap to add a new controller and follow the prompts.
3. Connect it to your home Wi-Fi when asked. A 2.4 GHz network is recommended.
4. When asked about your wiring, tell the app which zones are connected, and whether the M terminal runs a **master valve**, a **pump start relay**, or nothing.
5. Enter your address, so the weather data matches your yard.
6. Let the app run each zone briefly, then walk outside and see which part of the yard waters. Give each zone a plain name, like "Front lawn" or "Side flower bed."

Reading the lights

The Rachio 3 has a light bar on the front. Rachio's light-code chart explains every pattern. Two to know:

- **First section solid white, second section blinking yellow** — it has restarted and is reconnecting with your saved Wi-Fi details. That's normal for a short while.
- **Nine white blinks, then one red** — it couldn't connect to Wi-Fi, very often because of a mistyped password or network name.

GOOD TO KNOW

No monthly fee

Rachio describes its app as free and the Rachio 3 as having no monthly fees. Its weather features, including Weather Intelligence Plus, are part of the controller.

TIP

Name zones for people, not numbers

"Zone 4" means nothing to a spouse or house-sitter. "Back garden by the shed" does. Good names make every later step easier — sharing, voice commands and troubleshooting.

CHAPTER 11

Setting Up a Rain Bird Controller

Rain Bird controllers use the free **Rain Bird 2.0** app. There are two routes: a controller with Wi-Fi built in, such as the ARC series, or an existing controller with an **LNK2** Wi-Fi module plugged in.

Will the LNK2 fit my Rain Bird?

Rain Bird's LNK2 guide lists the ESP-TM2, ESP-RZXe and ESP-ME3 controllers, and ESP-ME controllers made after November 2, 2016. The controller should have a Wi-Fi symbol on its front panel. The LNK2 needs a 2.4 GHz network; it doesn't support 5 GHz.

Getting connected

1. Download the **Rain Bird 2.0** app and create an account.
2. For an LNK2: plug the module into the controller's accessory port, following the guide in the box.
3. In the app, tap **Add Controller** and follow the prompts to join your home Wi-Fi.
4. With an LNK2, the app reads the programs already saved in your controller, so you don't have to enter them again.
5. Check each station's name and run time, and test each one from the app.

TIP

Keep the dial on AUTO

On Rain Bird controllers with a dial, the app can only run your schedule when the dial is set to the automatic or run position. If the app says the controller is off, check the dial first.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

If you already own a recent Rain Bird, an LNK2 module gives you phone control and weather delays for a lot less than a new controller — and keeps the schedule your installer set up.

CHAPTER 12

Setting Up a B-hyve Controller

Orbit's B-hyve XR, and the hose timers, use the free **B-hyve** app for iPhone and Android.

Getting connected

1. Download the **B-hyve** app and create an account.
2. Tap to add a device and choose your model.
3. Stand near the controller. The app uses Bluetooth to find it, then connects it to your Wi-Fi. The XR works on 2.4 GHz or 5 GHz.
4. Enter your address for local weather.
5. Name each zone, and tell the app what's in it — grass, shrubs, flowers — along with the sprinkler type, sun and soil if asked. B-hyve uses these to work out watering.

Turn on Smart Watering and weather delays

B-hyve's own help pages make two points that are easy to miss. **Smart Watering** is turned on zone by zone. And the **Weather Delays** slider, under the device's details, has to be switched on — otherwise the controller could water during rain, high wind or freezing weather.

TIP

Programming at the box

The XR has a color screen and buttons, so you can also check and run zones right at the controller — handy for a family member who doesn't use the app.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Thirty seconds spent checking those two switches is what turns a B-hyve from a phone-controlled timer into one that actually skips the rainy days.

PART 4

Zones & Schedules

Telling the controller what's in each part of the yard, choosing a schedule that suits it, and staying within any local watering rules.

CHAPTER 13

Getting Your Zones Right

A smart controller makes its choices from what you tell it about each zone. Ten minutes walking the yard with your phone pays off all summer.

Walk the yard, zone by zone

1. In the app, start zone 1 for two or three minutes.
2. Walk outside and see what's watering. Note any heads that are broken, blocked, or spraying the driveway or the house.
3. Give the zone a plain name.
4. Note what it waters: lawn, shrubs, flower beds, a vegetable garden.
5. Note roughly how sunny it is: full sun, part shade, or shade.
6. Note the sprinkler type: pop-up spray heads, rotors that turn slowly, or drip line.
7. Stop the zone and move on to the next.

Enter the details in the app

Each brand asks for these details a little differently — plant or crop type, soil, sun exposure, slope, nozzle or sprinkler type. If you aren't sure, pick the closest match. You can always change it later, and the default settings are a reasonable starting point.

What you see	What to choose
Heads that pop up and spray a fan	Fixed spray
Heads that turn slowly, throwing a stream	Rotor
Thin hose or tubing at the base of plants	Drip
Water runs down the sidewalk or street	Mention slope, or clay soil; use cycle and soak

TIP

Turn off zones you don't use

If a zone waters a bed you've since paved over, or a garden you no longer plant, turn that zone off or remove it from the schedule rather than letting it run.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Shady beds stop getting soaked, sunny lawns stop browning, and the water bill reflects what the yard actually needs.

CHAPTER 14

Schedules That Make Sense

There are two basic kinds of schedule. A **fixed** schedule waters on the days and times you pick. A **smart** or **flexible** schedule lets the controller decide, within your limits.

Rachio: Fixed or Flex Daily

Rachio offers **Fixed** schedules, which run on days you choose, and **Flex Daily**, which Rachio describes as adjusting the interval between waterings every day based on real-time weather and the estimated moisture in the soil. A zone on Flex Daily waters only when its soil moisture is estimated to have dropped to a set level.

Rain Bird and B-hyve: programs

Rain Bird and B-hyve use **programs** — sets of zones, days and start times. Rain Bird adds **Seasonal Adjust** to stretch or shrink every run time (Chapter 17). B-hyve offers **Smart Watering**, which works out run times from your zone details and local weather. The B-hyve XR holds four programs, A to D.

Good habits for any schedule

- **Water early in the morning.** Less wind, less evaporation, and the grass dries during the day.
- **Water deeply, less often,** rather than a little every day. Roots grow deeper.
- **Use cycle and soak** on slopes and clay soil, so water soaks in instead of running off.
- **Give new sod or seed its own short-term schedule,** then go back to normal.
- **Check the schedule each spring** — it's the one time a year to look it over (Chapter 19).

TIP

Start simple

If the choices feel like too much, start with the app's recommended or default schedule for a few weeks. Watch the lawn, then adjust one zone at a time.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A schedule that follows the weather means you stop fiddling with the timer every few weeks. The controller does the adjusting so you don't have to.

CHAPTER 15

Watering Rules & Restrictions

Some towns and water providers limit lawn watering, especially during dry spells — certain days, certain hours, or odd and even addresses. Rules vary a great deal from place to place and can change during a drought, so I haven't listed any here. The place to check is your own water provider.

How to find out

1. Look at your water bill for your provider's name, website and phone number.
2. Check their website for "lawn watering," "irrigation" or "water restrictions."
3. If you're on a private well, public restrictions usually don't apply, but your well still has limits — a pro can tell you how much it can comfortably supply.
4. If you live in a neighborhood with a homeowners' association, check its rules too.

Set the controller to follow the rules

- Use a **fixed** schedule on the allowed days, or set your smart schedule's allowed days or watering window if the app offers one.
- Set the start time so watering finishes within allowed hours.
- During a temporary ban, turn on a long rain delay or put the controller in standby or off (Chapter 20 shows how for each brand).

SCAM ALERT

Fines by text message

A text or call saying you broke a watering rule and must pay a fine right now — by gift card, app or link — is a scam. Real notices come from your water provider, and you can always call the number on your bill to check.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Set it once and the controller keeps you on the right side of the rules, without you having to remember which day is yours.

PART 5

Weather Smarts

The features that make a smart controller worth having: skipping water when it rains, freezes or blows, and turning everything up or down with the seasons.

CHAPTER 16

Weather Skips: Rain, Freeze & Wind

A **skip** or **delay** is the controller deciding not to water because of the weather. These are the features that save the most water. Here's how each brand handles them.

Rachio

On a **Flex Daily** schedule, Rachio says **Rain Skip**, **Saturation Skip** and **Seasonal Shift** are built into the schedule's calculations and can't be turned off, while **Wind Skip** and **Freeze Skip** can still be customized. On a Fixed schedule, look in the schedule's settings for the weather skips and make sure the ones you want are on.

> TIP
> **Watch for the skip notice**
> Smart controller apps can usually send a notification when they skip a watering. Leave those on for the first few weeks — they're reassuring proof the weather features are working.

Rain Bird

In the Rain Bird 2.0 app, the automatic setting is called **Forecasted Rain Delay**.

1. Tap your controller on the main screen.
2. Tap the **settings gear** in the upper right.
3. Tap **Weather**.
4. Turn on **Forecasted Rain Delay**.
5. Pick the chance of rain that should trigger it (70%, 80% or 90%), the amount of rain, and how many days to pause.

For a one-time pause, use the **delay** button on the controller screen (the one with a rain and clock symbol) and choose how many days.

B-hyve

B-hyve's **Weather Delays** pause watering for rain, wind or cold based on thresholds. The switch is under the device's details in the app; the help pages describe turning weather restrictions on and off from the **My B-hyve** tab. Make sure it's on — if it isn't, B-hyve warns the controller could water during rain, high wind or freezing conditions.

HEADS UP

A freeze skip is not winterizing

Freeze skips keep the sprinklers from icing up the sidewalk on a cold spring morning. They do **not** protect the pipes in winter. In Northeast Ohio the system still needs a proper fall shutdown and blow-out (Chapter 18).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

No more sprinklers running in the rain, no more icy driveway from a frosty-morning watering, and no more wasted water on a windy day when the spray just blows into the street.

CHAPTER 17

Seasonal Adjust

A lawn needs much less water in cool, damp May than in a hot, dry July. **Seasonal adjust** turns every run time up or down by a percentage, so you don't have to change each zone by hand.

Rachio

On Flex Daily schedules, Rachio's **Seasonal Shift** is built in. You don't need to do anything.

Rain Bird

Rain Bird's **Seasonal Adjust** is set per program. 100% means normal run times; lower means shorter, higher means longer. The app can also adjust it automatically from weather data.

1. In the Rain Bird 2.0 app, open the controller and go to the **Program** screen.
2. Find **Seasonal Adjust** and switch on the automatic setting, or set a percentage yourself.
3. If you later turn the automatic setting off, slide the percentage back to the middle (100%) so run times go back to normal.

B-hyve

With **Smart Watering** turned on for a zone, B-hyve works out run times from local weather itself. For zones on a plain schedule, adjust run times by hand a couple of times a season.

TIP

A simple rhythm if you adjust by hand

Some people set run times lower in late spring, highest in midsummer, and lower again in September. Watch the lawn: a few brown spots in a hot spell is normal; puddles and mushrooms mean too much.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

One slider instead of a dozen zone settings. The yard gets more in the heat and less in the cool, and you hardly have to think about it.

PART 6

Through the Seasons

The Northeast Ohio sprinkler year: shutting down safely in the fall, starting up in the spring, going away on vacation, and smart hose timers for homes without an in-ground system.

CHAPTER 18

Fall Winterizing in Northeast Ohio

Our winters freeze the ground. Water left in sprinkler pipes, valves and heads can freeze, expand and crack them, and you find out in spring with a flooded zone and a repair bill. So every fall, before hard freezes, the system needs to be **winterized**: water shut off, pipes cleared, controller set for winter.

Who does what

Job	What it involves
Irrigation pro	Shuts off the water to the system, blows out each zone with compressed air, and protects the backflow preventer. Book early in the fall — many companies fill up their schedules.
You, in the app	Put the controller into its winter or off setting once the blow-out is done (or as the pro directs).

STAY SAFE

Leave the blow-out to a pro

Blowing out a system takes a large air compressor and care. Rain Bird's own guidance warns that the heat from compressed air can damage pipes and parts if a zone runs on air too long, and recommends a professional if you don't have the right compressor or aren't sure how to do it safely. Compressed air can also send debris flying — another good reason to let a pro handle it.

Rachio: Standby Mode

Rachio recommends **Standby Mode** for winter rather than unplugging, because the controller keeps getting updates. In the Rachio app, open your controller's **Device Settings** and turn on **Standby Mode**. Unplugging for the winter is also fine: Rachio says your schedules are backed up in the cloud and the controller picks up again when it has power.

Rain Bird: set it to OFF

Rain Bird says to set the timer to **OFF**. For systems *without* a pump, leaving it plugged in keeps the program safe and helps prevent condensation inside. If your controller runs a **pump**, Rain Bird recommends disconnecting the master valve and common wires for the winter so the pump can't start by accident. During a blow-out, Rain Bird's procedure keeps the controller on until the compressor is shut off, then the timer goes to OFF — so let the pro work first.

B-hyve: Device Run Mode OFF

In the B-hyve app, open **My B-hyve**, then **Devices**, choose the device, and set its **Device Run Mode** to **OFF**. In spring you switch it back to **AUTO**. B-hyve hose timers come off the faucet entirely for winter (Chapter 21).

TIP

Turn off the schedules too

Belt and suspenders: also switch off or disable each schedule in the app. Then nothing can accidentally start if someone takes the controller out of standby on a warm winter day.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A proper fall shutdown is the single best way to avoid a spring repair bill. Putting the controller in its winter mode takes a minute and means it won't try to water frozen pipes.

CHAPTER 19

Spring Startup

When the ground has thawed and the hard freezes are over, it's time to wake the system up. Many irrigation companies offer a spring startup visit; it's worth it if you had them blow the system out, because they'll turn the water back on slowly and check for damage.

Your part, in order

1. Let the pro (or a knowledgeable helper) turn the water back on to the system slowly and check the backflow preventer.
2. In the app, take the controller out of winter mode: Rachio, turn off **Standby Mode**; Rain Bird, set it back to automatic; B-hyve, set **Device Run Mode** to **AUTO**.
3. Make sure the controller is online. If it isn't, see Chapter 24.
4. Run each zone for a few minutes and walk the yard. Look for heads that don't pop up, geysers, soggy spots or spray hitting the house.
5. Turn back on any schedules you switched off in the fall.
6. Check that weather skips and seasonal adjust are on.
7. Update the app on your phone.

HEADS UP

A geyser or a soggy patch

A head shooting water into the air, or a patch of lawn that's always wet, usually means a broken head or a cracked pipe. Stop the zone in the app and call an irrigation pro.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Fifteen minutes of walking the zones in spring catches small problems before they waste a summer's worth of water.

CHAPTER 20

Vacations & Time Away

One of the nicest things about a smart controller is that you can keep an eye on the yard from anywhere with internet.

Before you go

- Check that the controller is online in the app.
- Leave the normal smart schedule running — it will skip for rain on its own.
- If the house will be empty for a long time and you'd rather not risk a leak, pause watering instead (below).
- Share access with a neighbor or family member who can check on it (Chapter 22).

Pausing watering for a while

Brand	How to pause
Rachio	Use a rain delay or skip from the app, or turn on Standby Mode for longer absences. With Alexa: "Alexa, tell Rachio to set a rain delay for" a number of days.
Rain Bird	Tap the **delay** button on the controller screen and choose the number of days, or set the controller to off.
B-hyve	Use a rain delay in the app, or set Device Run Mode to OFF.

TIP

Coming home

Put a note on the fridge, or a reminder in your phone, to turn watering back on when you return.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Peace of mind on the road: you can see that the yard is being watered, or that nothing is running, without asking a neighbor to fiddle with the timer.

CHAPTER 21

Smart Hose Timers for Homes Without Sprinklers

No in-ground system? A **smart hose timer** screws onto an outdoor faucet. You connect a garden hose, sprinkler or soaker hose to it, and it turns the water on and off on a schedule. Most run on AA batteries.

Rachio Smart Hose Timer

Rachio's starter kit — one valve plus a Wi-Fi hub — is listed at $99.99 on rachio.com as of November 2026. The valve takes two AA batteries (not included). The hub plugs in indoors, connects to 2.4 GHz Wi-Fi, and can manage up to eight valves.

Orbit B-hyve XD hose faucet timers

The B-hyve XD comes with one, two or four outlets. Some models are Bluetooth-only, meaning you control them from your phone when you're nearby. Others include a **B-hyve Smart Gen 2 Hub**, which puts them on Wi-Fi so you can control them from anywhere and use weather-based watering. As of November 2026, Orbit's own store lists the 4-outlet Bluetooth-only model at $99.99 and the 4-outlet with hub at $134.99; other sizes vary. One hub can serve several timers.

Setting one up

1. Put fresh AA batteries in the timer.
2. Screw it onto the outdoor faucet by hand. Don't overtighten.
3. Attach your hose to the timer's outlet.
4. Turn the faucet fully on. From now on, the timer opens and closes the water.
5. If your model has a hub, plug the hub in indoors near a window or door facing the faucet.
6. Pair it in the app, name it ("Tomato bed"), and set a schedule.

Batteries and winter

- B-hyve's help pages say low batteries make the timer switch itself to **OFF**, and it may not switch back on its own. After new batteries, open **My B-hyve** > **Devices**, choose the timer, and set **Device Run Mode** to **AUTO**.

- Orbit says to remove the timer from the faucet when freezing weather is expected and store it indoors. In Northeast Ohio, that means bringing it in every fall, along with the hose.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

No more dragging the hose around at dusk or forgetting it running overnight. The garden gets watered on time, even when you're away.

PART 7

Sharing & Voice Control

Letting a spouse, grown child, neighbor or landscaper help run the sprinklers — safely — and talking to your controller through Alexa or Google.

CHAPTER 22

Sharing with Family or a Landscaper

You don't need to hand out your password. All three apps let you share the controller with someone else, using their own account. That's safer, and you can take the access away later.

Rachio: Shared Access

Rachio's **Shared Access** lets you give different levels of access to the people you choose, controller by controller. Look for sharing in your controller's settings in the app and enter the other person's email. They'll need their own free Rachio account.

Rain Bird: a share code

1. Ask the other person to install the Rain Bird 2.0 app and create an account.
2. On their phone, they tap the **gear** (settings) icon on the main screen, go to the sharing section, and tap **Share Code**. They send you the code.
3. On your phone, open the controller and choose **Share Controller**.
4. Enter their code. Choose an expiration date if you like — handy for a house-sitter — or share with no end date.
5. To change or remove access later, use **Manage Shared Controllers**.

B-hyve: Device Sharing

1. In the B-hyve app, tap **My B-hyve**, then **Devices**.
2. Choose the controller or timer, then **Device Sharing**.
3. Choose the level: a **Manager** can add and remove other people and can remove the device from the account; a **Guest** can view, edit and run it.
4. Generate an access code and send it to the other person. They enter it after signing in to their own B-hyve account.

> **TIP**
>
> **Give the landscaper the smallest key that works**
>
> For a lawn service, the lower level (B-hyve Guest, or a limited Rachio level) is usually plenty. Keep the top level for yourself and one trusted family member.

HEADS UP

If a landscaper set it up on their account

If a contractor installed the controller and added it to *their* app account, ask them to transfer it to yours, then share access back to them. The controller should belong to the person who owns the house.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A grown child can check on things from another state, the landscaper can test zones without a phone call, and you stay in charge of who has a key.

CHAPTER 23

Talking to Your Sprinklers: Alexa & Google

All three brands work with Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant, so you can start a zone or pause watering by voice. You link your sprinkler account to Alexa or Google once, in their apps.

Linking

1. **Alexa:** in the Alexa app, open **Skills**, search for your brand (Rachio, Rain Bird or B-hyve), enable the skill and sign in with your sprinkler account.
2. **Google:** in the Google Home app, tap to add a device, choose **Works with Google**, search for your brand and sign in.
3. Say a test command.

Rachio commands that work

Rachio's own list of Alexa commands starts with "Alexa, tell Rachio…" For example:

- "Alexa, tell Rachio to run zone three for ten minutes."
- "Alexa, tell Rachio to set a rain delay for three days."
- "Alexa, tell Rachio to cancel rain delay."
- "Alexa, tell Rachio to pause for ten minutes" and "Alexa, tell Rachio to resume watering."

TIP

Say "zone" and the number

Voice commands are picky. People using Rachio report that "zone three" works more reliably than a zone's nickname, and that commands work best said the way the help page lists them.

Rain Bird and B-hyve

Rain Bird lists Alexa and Google Assistant for the ARC8 and for controllers with an LNK2 module. Orbit lists Google and Alexa for the B-hyve XR. The exact phrases differ by brand; each skill's page in the Alexa app lists examples.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Hands dirty in the garden? Say the word and zone two runs for five minutes, without taking off your gloves to find your phone.

PART 8

Fixing Problems, Staying Safe & Getting Help

What to do when the controller is offline or a zone won't run, the scams that target homeowners, an honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary.

CHAPTER 24

When the Controller Says Offline

"Offline" means the app can't reach the controller over the internet. The cause is usually the Wi-Fi, not the controller. Work through these in order.

Try these first

1. Is there power? Look at the controller's lights or screen. Check the outlet with a lamp, and check whether a GFCI outlet (the kind with Test and Reset buttons) has tripped in the garage.
2. Is the internet working in the house? Try a website on your phone over Wi-Fi.
3. Restart your modem and router: unplug them, wait 30 seconds, and plug them back in. Give them a few minutes.
4. Restart the controller: unplug it for a few seconds, plug it back in, and give it a couple of minutes to reconnect.
5. Open the app and pull down to refresh.

If you changed your router or Wi-Fi password

The controller only knows the old network. You'll need to give it the new one:

- **Rachio:** in the app, open your controller's settings and look for the option to update the Wi-Fi network. On the Rachio 3, nine white blinks then one red means it couldn't connect — often a password typo.
- **Rain Bird:** use the Wi-Fi setup steps in the Rain Bird 2.0 app for your controller. Remember the LNK2 needs 2.4 GHz.
- **B-hyve:** stand near the controller with your phone and use the app's Wi-Fi setup for the device.

If it keeps dropping off

- The signal is probably weak where the controller hangs. See Chapter 5 for ways to strengthen it.
- A new router that sends only one combined network name can confuse some controllers. A router setting to keep 2.4 GHz available, or a temporary 2.4 GHz-only mode, can help.
- Bill's guide on getting a smart device back on Wi-Fi goes deeper on routers and bands.

GOOD TO KNOW

Does it still water while offline?

Don't count on smart features while it's offline: the controller can't get new weather data or changes from your phone. Get it back online before relying on it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Most offline problems are fixed in five minutes by restarting the router and controller, or re-entering a new Wi-Fi password. No service call needed.

CHAPTER 25

When a Zone Won't Run (or Won't Stop)

If the app says a zone is running but nothing happens in the yard, the controller is usually fine and the problem is out at the water, the wire or the valve.

A zone won't run

1. Is the water to the system turned on? After winter, check that the main irrigation shutoff is open.
2. Is the controller in standby, off, or a rain delay? Check the app.
3. Do *all* zones fail? Then look at the main water, the master valve, or the pump.
4. Does only *one* zone fail? Check that its wire is firmly in the right terminal on the controller, matching your photo.
5. Did someone dig, edge or plant near that zone recently? A cut wire is common.
6. Still nothing? It's likely the valve or the wire in the yard. Call an irrigation pro.

A zone won't stop

1. Stop all watering in the app.
2. If water keeps running, unplug the controller.
3. If it *still* runs, the valve is stuck open — the controller isn't the problem. Turn off the water to the sprinkler system at its shutoff valve.
4. Call an irrigation pro to repair the valve.

TIP

Find your shutoff now

Know where your sprinkler system's water shutoff is before you need it — often in the basement near the water meter, or in a box in the yard. Write it on the cheat-sheet in Chapter 28.

HEADS UP

A wiring fault message

If the app reports a wiring or electrical fault on one zone, there may be a short in that zone's wire or valve. Leave that zone off and have a pro test it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

These few checks tell you whether it's a two-minute fix at the controller or a job for a pro — so you only pay for a visit when you really need one.

CHAPTER 26

Scams & Safety Around Sprinklers

Water bills, rebates and yard work all attract scammers. Here are the tricks to watch for, and the simple habits that keep you safe.

SCAM ALERT

"Your water will be shut off today"

The FTC says that if you get an unexpected call, text, email or visit from your gas, electric or water company threatening to shut off service unless you pay right away, it's a scam. Hang up, don't click, and call the number on your real bill.

SCAM ALERT

Gift cards, wire transfers, crypto or a barcode

The FTC says a caller demanding payment by gift card, reload card, wire transfer or cryptocurrency is a scammer, every time. So is a text with a barcode to pay at a store. Real utilities don't take payment that way.

SCAM ALERT

Door-to-door upsells

Someone knocks to say your sprinklers are "wasting water," "out of code" or "need a new smart controller today, or you'll be fined." Don't agree to anything at the door. Get the company's name, look it up yourself, and get a second written quote. Ask your water provider directly about any rule they mention.

SCAM ALERT

Fake support numbers

Searching for "sprinkler app help" can turn up ads for "support" lines that charge for useless repairs or ask to take control of your computer. Use the help pages in the official app or on the company's own website.

SCAM ALERT

Fake rebate and account emails

An email says your sprinkler account is locked, or a rebate is waiting, and asks you to click and sign in. Open the app yourself instead. If you're unsure, ask someone you trust before clicking.

If you've already paid or clicked

- If you paid with a gift card, call the card company right away and tell them it was used in a scam.
- Change the password on any account you signed in to from the link.
- Report it to the FTC at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**.
- Call your real water provider so they know.

Electrical and water safety

- Unplug the controller before moving wires.
- Never open or rewire a controller that's wired straight into household power — call an electrician.
- Keep outdoor outlets covered and use the weatherproof covers they came with.
- Leave valves, backflow preventers and blow-outs to an irrigation pro.
- Call 811 before anyone digs in the yard, so buried utility lines can be marked.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Two habits — never pay a caller on the spot, and always call the number on your own bill — protect you from nearly every utility scam.

CHAPTER 27

When to Call Bill

Most of what's in this guide you can do yourself, at your own pace. But part of being helpful is being honest about when a hand saves you time and worry. Here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **Deciding whether a smart controller fits your system** — I'll look at the wiring with you and tell you honestly if it's a simple swap.
- **The low-voltage swap and app setup** — moving the wires, naming zones, setting schedules and weather skips, and showing you how it all works.
- **Wi-Fi that won't reach the garage**, or a controller that keeps dropping offline.
- **Sharing it with family** so a grown child or neighbor can help from their own phone.
- **Setting up voice control** with Alexa or Google.
- **Not sure whether it's a tech problem or a plumbing problem** — I'll tell you straight, and point you to an irrigation pro if it's the valves, pipes or backflow.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace, explain what I'm doing in plain words, and never talk down to anyone. I'll tell you honestly when something isn't worth your money, and I don't sell controllers. I've been doing this kind of work for more than 30 years, and I serve Portage County, Ohio, in person, and folks farther away by remote help. I don't do plumbing, valves or blow-outs — those belong with an irrigation professional.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042** or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. This guide is yours to keep for free; if you'd like a hand, I'm only a phone call away.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may meet Sophie first

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you might be greeted by **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and help you book a time. A real person — me — does the actual help.

Thanks for reading. A well-set controller is one of those small things that quietly makes life easier all summer long.

— Bill

CHAPTER 28

Your Smart Sprinkler Cheat-Sheet

Keep this near the controller. The whole guide, boiled down.

The essentials

Topic	Remember
Rachio	Rachio app. Fixed or Flex Daily schedules. Winter: Device Settings > Standby Mode. Share with Shared Access.
Rain Bird	Rain Bird 2.0 app. Weather: controller > gear > Weather > Forecasted Rain Delay. Winter: set to OFF. Share with a Share Code.
B-hyve	B-hyve app. Turn on Smart Watering and Weather Delays. Winter: Device Run Mode OFF. Share with Device Sharing.
Wi-Fi	2.4 GHz is the safe choice. Test the signal where the controller hangs.
Fall	Pro blow-out first, then winter mode. Hose timers come inside.
Spring	Pro turns water on, then AUTO, walk every zone, schedules back on.
Rebates	epa.gov/watersense/rebate-finder and your water provider.
Scams	Never pay a caller on the spot. Call the number on your bill.

Write it down once

Keep handy	
Controller brand & model	_____
Number of zones	_____
Zone names (1, 2, 3…)	_____
Master valve or pump? (M wire)	_____
Sprinkler water shutoff location	_____
App account email	_____
Who has shared access	_____
Irrigation pro (blow-out & startup)	_____
Water provider phone (from the bill)	_____

When something's wrong, in order

1. Is the controller powered? Check the outlet and any GFCI.
2. Is it online in the app?
3. Is it in standby, off, or a rain delay?
4. Is the water to the system turned on?
5. Restart the router, then the controller.
6. Check the zone's wire against your photo.
7. Water won't stop? Unplug the controller, then close the sprinkler shutoff.
8. Still stuck? Call Bill at (330) 200-8042 — or an irrigation pro for valves and pipes.