

- **Pros**

Easy installation and setup. Sleek design. Works with iOS, Android, and Web browsers.

- **Bottom Line**

The Skydrop Wi-Fi Sprinkler Controller connects to your home network and allows you to control your lawn watering system from anywhere.



Automatic sprinkler controllers have been around forever, but the newest crop of [digital home](#) irrigation regulators from companies like Greenbox, Rachio, and Skydrop make it possible to control your sprinkler system remotely via your wireless network. The Skydrop Wi-Fi Sprinkler Controller (\$299) not only lets you schedule watering times using a smartphone app or Web browser, it will anticipate your watering needs based on your local weather forecast and lawn conditions, and can be programmed to adhere to local watering restrictions. Installing this snappy-looking device takes less than 10 minutes, and the app is well-designed and easy to use. Granted, Skydrop's is double the price of a standard controller, but it still merits an Editors' Choice award for connected sprinkler controllers.

Design and Setup

With its streamlined design, gunmetal gray finish, and large aluminum jog dial, the Skydrop controller looks nothing like a traditional square-box sprinkler controller. It snaps onto a 2.7-by-6.2-by-0.5 inch (HWD) wall plate, which contains eight watering zone wiring ports, two common wire ports, a master valve port (for systems equipped with a master valve option), a hot terminal for testing purposes, and a power plug port. All of the wire ports are tool free; just push the wire in until it clicks and press the rubberized button to release. There are two slots on the bottom that are used to run power and zone wiring to the plate, and there's a small built-in level on the top used for mounting the plate properly. If you have an extra-large lawn, Skydrop sells an expansion unit for \$50 that allows you to add an additional eight watering zones.

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The controller measures 3.4 by 9.7 by 1.9 inches (HWD). It has a 4.3-inch LCD in the center, and a round, 3-inch jog dial on the right. The dial sports a silver aluminum band around its outer edge and a backlit ring around its inner edge. The ring glows blue when the system is in watering mode, green when it is waiting for its next scheduled watering session, and red if there's a system error. Inside is a Wi-Fi radio that supports the 802.11b/g/n networking protocols.

In addition to the wall plate and controller, the Skydrop comes with four mounting screws, a power adapter, numbered stickers for the zone wires, and an Installation and Quick Start Guide that walks you through the installation process. Missing is any information explaining how the controller actually works, what the different colored lights mean, and how your input will affect how often Skydrop will water your lawn. However, the folks at Skydrop are currently working on a comprehensive user guide that will address these issues.

Installing the Skydrop was quick and easy. I marked each zone wire with the numbered stickers (I have five watering zones) before removing them from my original Orbit controller box. I removed the Orbit box and attached the Skydrop wall plate in its place (the Orbit controller was installed in a utility closet in my

basement where the sprinkler plumbing is located). I ran the zone wires, a common wire, and the power wire up through the slots, connected them to the appropriate wire ports, snapped the controller into the wall plate, and plugged in the power adapter. The entire process took a little under 10 minutes.

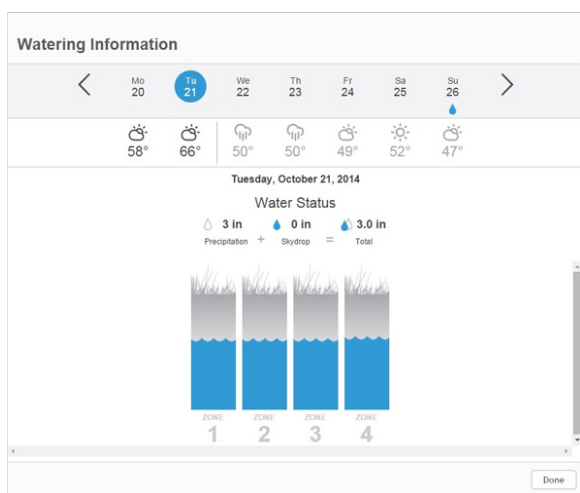


Skydrop inline 1

Features and Performance

You can program Skydrop using the jog dial and LCD screen, but it's much easier to do using a Web browser, or the iOS or Android app. When you first set up Skydrop, you have to answer a few questions regarding your lawn environment and location. It asks you what zip code you're in so it can monitor the local weather, and it wants to know what kind of soil you have (sandy, loamy, unsure) in each watering zone. For example, lawns with a sandy soil base will require more water because sandy soil does not retain water very well. Conversely, lawns with a loamy base require less water.

Skydrop also wants to know what types of vegetation you'll be watering (grass, shrubs, trees, ground cover), sprinkler types (spray, rotary, drip), shade (none, partial, full), and slope (none, slight, steep). Using this data coupled with your local hourly weather updates, Skydrop then creates a customized watering schedule designed to keep your lawn looking its best while conserving water. It even provides a daily history of water usage that shows you when the lawn was watered and how much water was supplied by the sprinklers compared to how much was supplied by rainfall. You can also create your own watering schedule if you don't want to use Skydrop's recommendations.



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In my tests, the Skydrop controller did a good job of following my watering schedule, beginning promptly at 9:00 a.m. on most days and forgoing the watering schedule on cooler days or when it rained. I created a custom schedule for my backyard lawn, which was recently seeded and requires a more aggressive watering schedule than the rest of my property, and the Skydrop followed it to a tee. Since my water usage is billed quarterly, I can't say exactly how much the Skydrop saved me, but knowing that my lawn was not being watered every day (as it was with my old Orbit controller), it's safe to assume that the bill will be lower than usual. Moreover, with my old controller I had to go into the basement where the box was located to manually turn on a zone, and then go back down when I wanted

to turn it off. With the Skydrop I was able to do this from my PC or smartphone and was impressed with the instantaneous response to my commands.?

Conclusions

Like the [Valta Starter Kit](#), the Skydrop Wi-Fi Sprinkler Controller is one of those connected home products that makes life easier while saving you money. Having the ability to remotely control and monitor your sprinkler system is a win for homeowners who aren't always around to make sure their lawn is being properly watered, but the potential for significant water conservation is the best reason to consider replacing your existing controller with the Skydrop, and is partly why it earns our Editors' Choice for

connected sprinkler controllers. You'll pay more for this smart sprinkler than you will for a basic model, but there's a good chance you'll recover the extra cost over time while doing your part to preserve a natural resource.

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