

HOSE END TIMERS *Submitted by Charlie Beck*

Hose end timers are very useful in a smalltime nursery situation. Containerized plants generally require shorter, more frequent watering cycles than do in ground plants. Shade grown plants require shorter watering cycles than sun grown plants. Hose end timers give you added flexibility when watering containerized plants. Anyplace you need a custom water cycle, such as, filling a bird bath, drip irrigation, or topping off a fish pond, these timers may fit the bill for you.

I have used hose end timers for more than 30 years. I've bought many of the major brands including Nelson, Orbit, Raindrip, Melnor and many others including solar powered units. I'll share some of my thoughts on these timers.

Over the years hose end timers have become easier to program. Old style timers required special instructions to set the program. Sometimes instructions were printed on the timer in small print which would disappear due to outdoor exposure. Sometimes instructions were only shown in the owner's manual. If you lost the instructions, you were in trouble. My theory is that programming these timers should be obvious. If you need to consult instructions in order to program the unit, don't buy that model.

Timer durability is an important factor. Some brands are much more durable than others. Occasionally even the best model is short lived, but some brands tend to last longer than others. Generally, I think that water intrusion though the timer housing is the main cause of timer failure. Battery compartments, dials and buttons all need to be adequately sealed.

Timers either come with or without LCD display screens. I avoid any timer which does not have a clear, large, LCD display. I don't want to kneel on the ground with reading glasses to monitor the condition or determine the programming cycle. It should be easy to see if the timer is turned on or off with a simple glance. Battery charge indicator should also be easy to read.

The timer should have a clock display so that coordination of different timers might be easily accomplished. If your supply of water comes from a pump you can time watering events together to minimize the number of "pump on" cycles. The clock display should be large and easy to see in the sunlight. Timers without a display screen only have internal clocks which turn on at an interval from the actual time you set it. If you happen to set it at 8AM for a 24 hour cycle, it will cycle every day at 8AM. If you want the timer to cycle at midnight then you have to physically set the timer at midnight. There is no way to recall the start time on these timers because there is no clock display on the unit.

If you use well water to supply your timer, I highly recommend using a hose end water filter instead of the screened washer which is typically supplied with the timer. If you use city water the screened washer works fine, but well water can clog the screened washer quite rapidly. This will result in reduced or no water flow through your timer.

The only timers that I currently use are the Nelson 56607 Single Outlet and the Nelson 56612 Double Outlet Timers. Generally I have found these to be the most durable and easy to use timers. They have a large, bright LCD display. Programming is obvious- no reading owner's manual is required. They have a dial which allows easy programming and easy on/off control. You can see at a glance if the timer is turned on or off. It has an easy to use manual override to provide instant timed watering in addition to the programming. The up/down buttons are well-sealed and are large and easy to push. The Double Outlet timer has the ability to program two unique timing events through separate outlets. If you want to water your sun grown containers 30 minutes and your shade grown containers 15 minutes, you can do it all with this single timer. The timer continually flashes on the screen when the next timer event will occur. This is an important feature. Sometimes all of these timers have a glitch which erases the programming. It doesn't occur often but when it does occur on this timer, it will not flash the next timer event. You can tell at a glance that a reprogramming is required. No other timer that I ever used indicates that the next timer event has gone awry. You can see this indication at a glance without entering programming mode. These timers sell for less than \$40 on the internet and are well worth the investment.



Nelson Single and Double Outlet Hose End Timers