

Drip irrigation

Takehara Landscape Designs, Gardena, CA looks to innovative products for more flexibility.



Drip irrigation allows for precise placement of water.

WHEN NATHAN TAKEHARA saw an up-to-date drip irrigation system at an industry trade show six years ago, he was surprised. He had recently relocated his landscape business to southern California from Hawaii, where he had been using what he now calls “primitive products.” The drip system on display was radically different from what he’d been installing, and it offered a range of innovative features that would give him greater design flexibility — and help him build his business.

Takehara Landscape Designs is known for creating authentic Japanese-style landscapes. Clients who desire a traditional Japanese garden have certain images in mind: a landscape that creates a sense of serenity; traditional plants and features; perhaps a koi pond, a waterfall or river rock stream.

To create a dramatic Asian garden — or any complex design with angles and curves, ponds and garden walls — Takehara needed irrigation products that would be flexible.

“It was clear to me that to expand our design business, we had to include the newest drip products in our plans,” he says. “It was the best way to ensure creativity, water conservation and minimal maintenance.”

Becoming a drip expert did not require any capital outlay or extensive training, Takehara says. He and his crew had been installing overhead systems for years, and already had the tools and knowledge. After a couple on-site “tutorials,” and a little research and reading, Takehara and his lead installer had it figured out after the first job.

“I made the right contacts when I decided to install Netafim Techline CV on a project,” he says. “The company’s sales rep was very helpful and patient and guided me through the entire process. It was hands-on training, and it really paid off.

“Now I use both 17mm and new

12mm on-surface drip line, depending on the site,” Takehara continues. “The 12mm is ideal for smaller beds, hardscape channels, garden walls or other creative features. Both products are self-flushing and pressure-compensating, and 17mm has check valves.”

Takehara says that anyone who is familiar with landscape irrigation can expand into drip. The same controllers, valves and irrigation lines are used, but instead of rigid PVC, it’s flexible tubing. There’s virtually no additional expense. Drip line costs about the same as rigid pipe, but neither PVC glue nor cement are needed because drip tubing has barbed or insert fittings.”

“Clients are enthusiastic about drip because they see new benefits,” says Takehara. “Drip delivers water directly to the root zones slowly, and at lower pressure. Plants flourish because they get the precise amount of water they need. There is no overspray or water running down the gutter. This all means substantial water savings — and it’s good for the environment because today’s tubing is made from recycled materials.”

Major municipalities, like Los Angeles County, are promoting the use of drip line for all those same reasons. And with new regional mandates across the U.S. to cut water use, drip is becoming increasingly popular.

“Drip irrigation allowed us to focus on the type of installations that we wanted to do,” Takehara points out. “It’s very compatible with the clean, refined look of contemporary architecture as well as traditional gardens.”

His advice to contractors is to not be “squeamish” about drip irrigation.

“It’s the future. Expand your capabilities, and you’ll earn more money,” he says. “...You’ll also see the benefits of a new business niche, healthier landscapes and water-wise environment.”

The author is a partner at Hardwick Creative Services and writes about landscape irrigation.

>> SERVICE SNAPSHOT

WHY DRIP IRRIGATION: Drip’s design flexibility and water-saving features helped Nathan Takehara carve out a new niche for his business while attracting more clients interested in his specialized services.

INITIAL INVESTMENT: No capital expense if a contractor is already installing overhead irrigation systems and has the basic tools. Hands-on training is a must, and can often be arranged with a manufacturer’s rep.

WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT: Water costs are lower because irrigation is applied in a more precise manner; plants, trees and shrubs are healthier; overspray is eliminated, along with run-off and erosion; there’s less maintenance; and it’s eco-friendly because new drip lines are made with recycled content.