

What Scott Saw Before the Sod Went Down

Before laying the sod, Scott Conner wanted to see what would happen beneath it.

The landscape project was nearing completion. The home overlooked the Feather River Canyon in Paradise, California, offering sweeping views. But the steeply sloping front yard had provided little usable outdoor space.

After months of demanding work, Scott had transformed that slope into a series of terraced retaining walls, a cascading pondless waterfall, and a new paver patio. One of the final elements was a small lawn nestled between the deck, patio, and waterfall.

The irrigation beneath that lawn would be a departure from Scott's usual approach.

Scott had used drip irrigation around large trees and shrubbery on previous projects. But installing it beneath a sod lawn was something new.

The idea came from Gary, a longtime and trusted supplier at Ewing Irrigation in Chico, California. Gary told Scott he'd used subsurface drip irrigation in his own lawn, including a narrow strip between the sidewalk and street. Unlike conventional sprinklers, the buried drip lines delivered water without spraying sidewalks or pedestrians.

Scott recognized the advantages. Less overspray, less evaporation, and greater control over how much water was delivered. The Botinni lawn was small enough to give the application a try.

First, he had to prepare the ground.

The existing soil was a problem. It contained clay and other compacted material that wouldn't provide the conditions Scott wanted for a new lawn.

He excavated approximately six inches of the unsuitable soil and replaced it with fresh topsoil mixed with sand. The mixture would help moisture spread beyond the individual drip emitters.



On October 23, 2018, Scott installed the ½-inch subsurface drip lines in the prepared ground.

Unlike the smaller ¼-inch tubing commonly used in planting beds, this system delivered water through emitters built into the line.

*October 23, 2018 — The drip lines and distribution connections before covering.
Photograph: Paula Conner.*

The field test

October 24, 2018. Time to test the system, not simply bury it.

Scott turned on the irrigation and watched. Would the moisture remain concentrated around each emitter, or spread into the surrounding soil?

The sand in the soil mixture helped reveal the wetting pattern as darkened areas appeared across the surface.

“It wasn’t perfect, but it was really good,” Scott recalled.

Satisfied with what he saw, he made no adjustments.

The sod could go down.

October 25, 2018. The new sod lawn was in place, completing the landscape Scott had spent months designing and building.

Beneath that fresh green lawn, the irrigation system was now out of sight. But Scott had already seen what he needed to see.

The experience gave him confidence in using subsurface drip irrigation for lawns. Although he never had another opportunity to install it before the Camp Fire, he has since recommended the approach to other contractors.



Oct. 24 — Darkened areas in the sand during the irrigation test.



Oct. 25 — Newly installed sod covering the irrigation system

Field-tested. From Product to Proof.

Independent portfolio sample based on Scott Conner Landscape project interviews and original project photographs. Irrigation product manufacturer unverified.