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(54) **WATER TIMER AND METHOD**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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A water timer user interface has display areas for display of water timer status information, including watering zone and watering duration indicators, user input areas, and a touch-sensitive screen. At least one of the display areas may display a graphical representation of the watering duration indicators for the watering zone identifiers. All of the display and input areas may be simultaneously visible to and accessible by a user. The display areas may simultaneously display both graphical and numeric representations of the watering duration indicators. An ambient temperature sensor may be used to sense the ambient temperature and humidity and provide corresponding signals to the controller to permit the controller to modify the amount of water supplied.

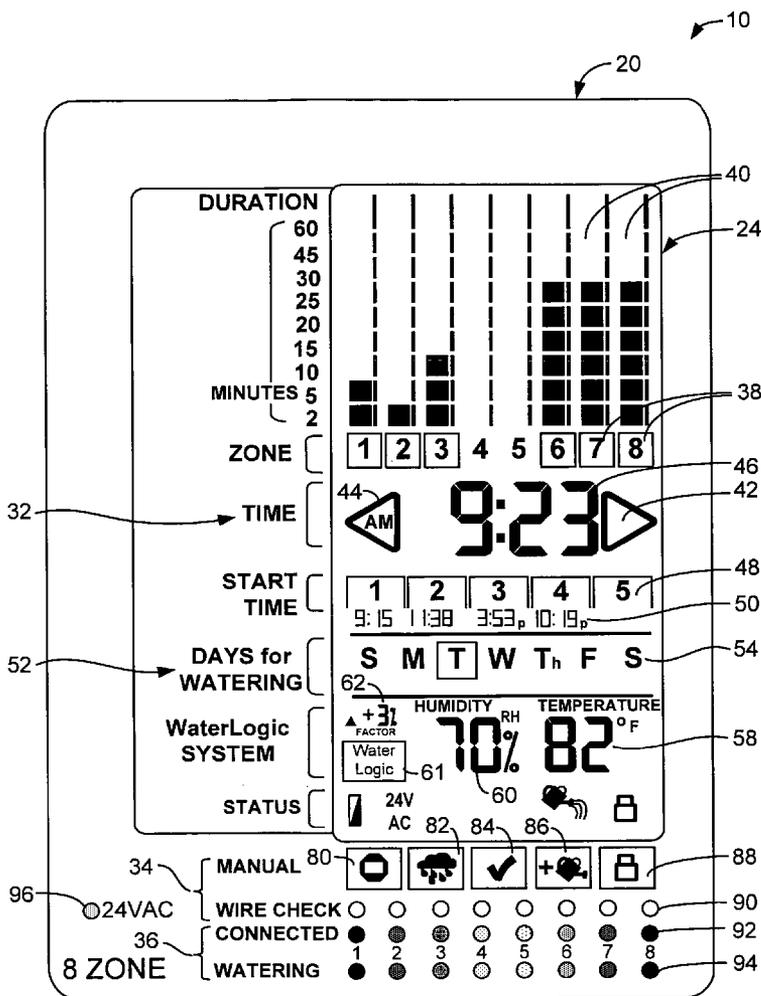
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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/664,561, filed on Mar. 23, 2005.



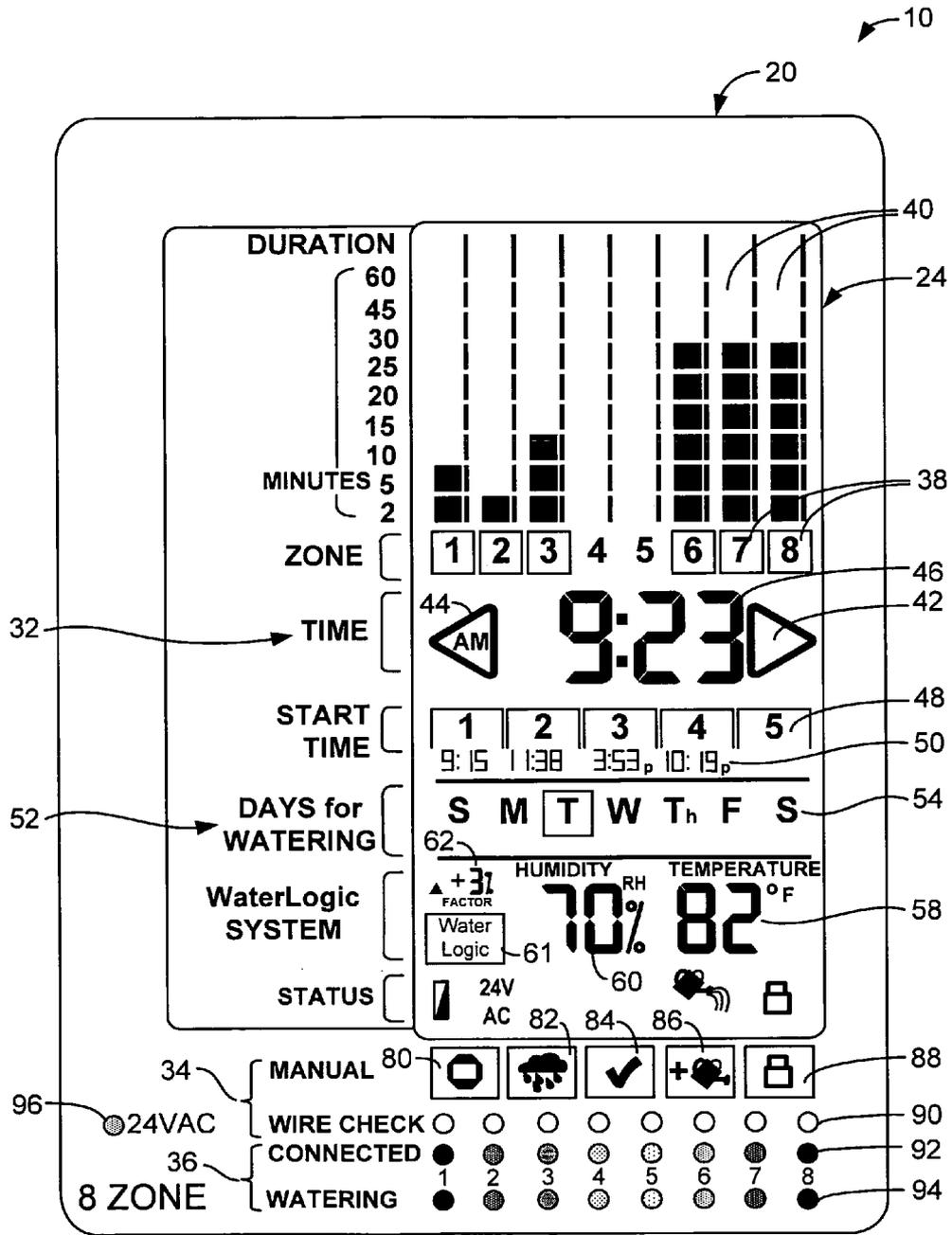


FIG. 2

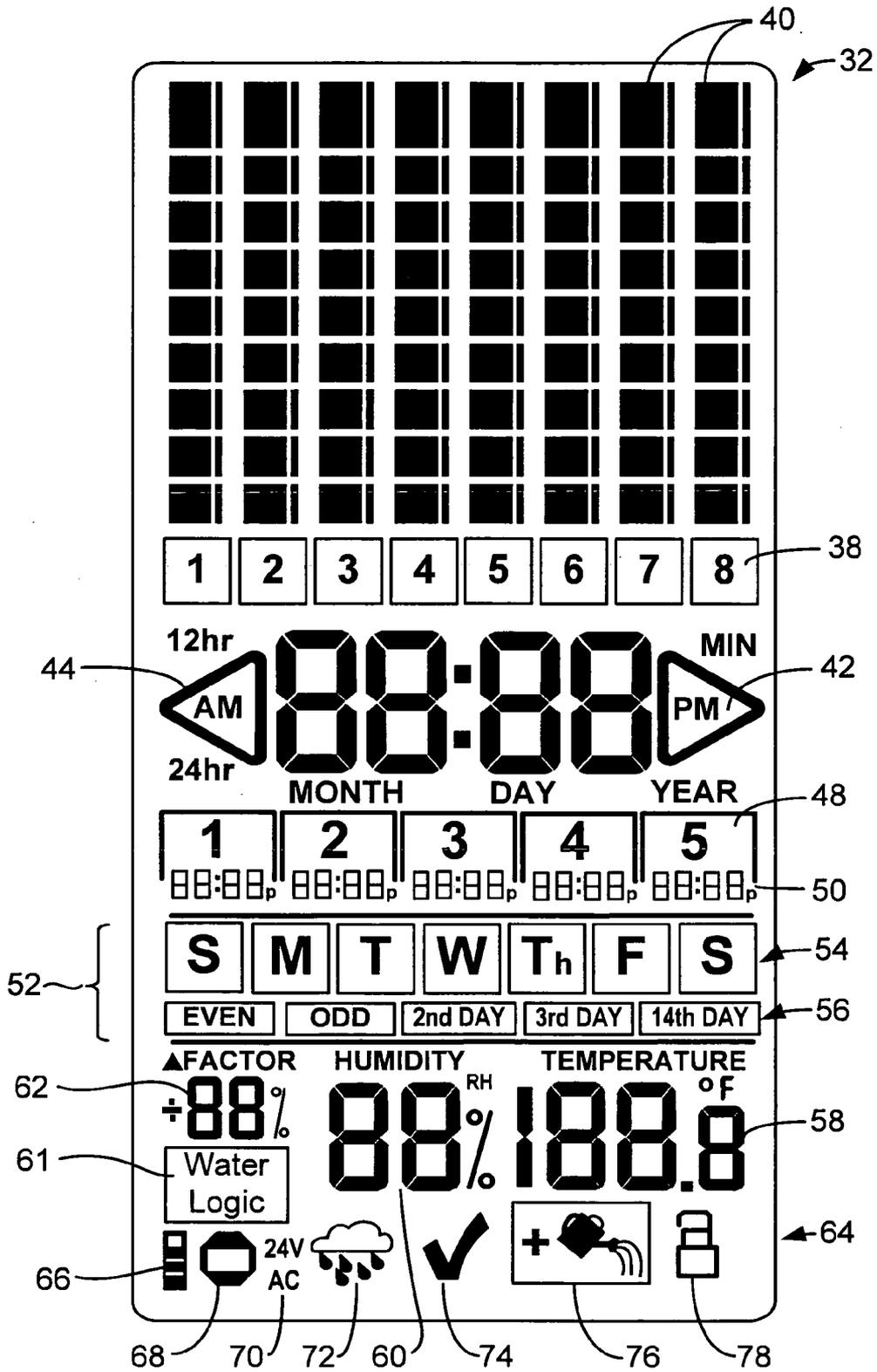


FIG. 3

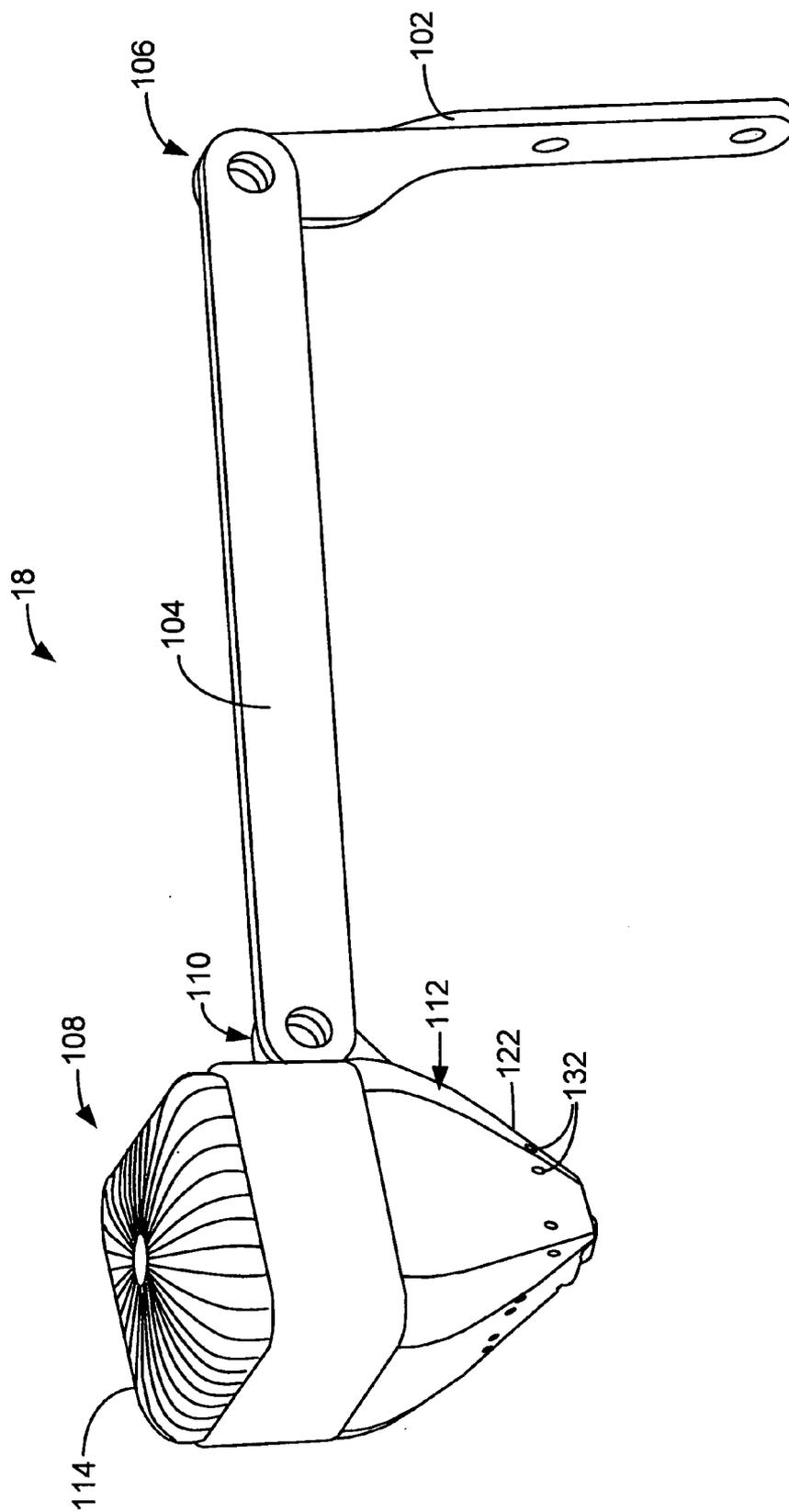


FIG. 4

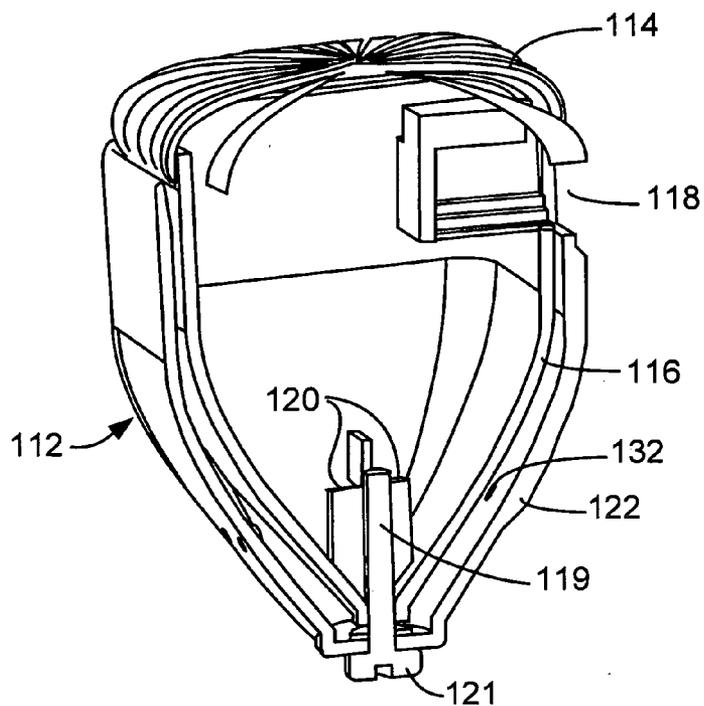


FIG. 5

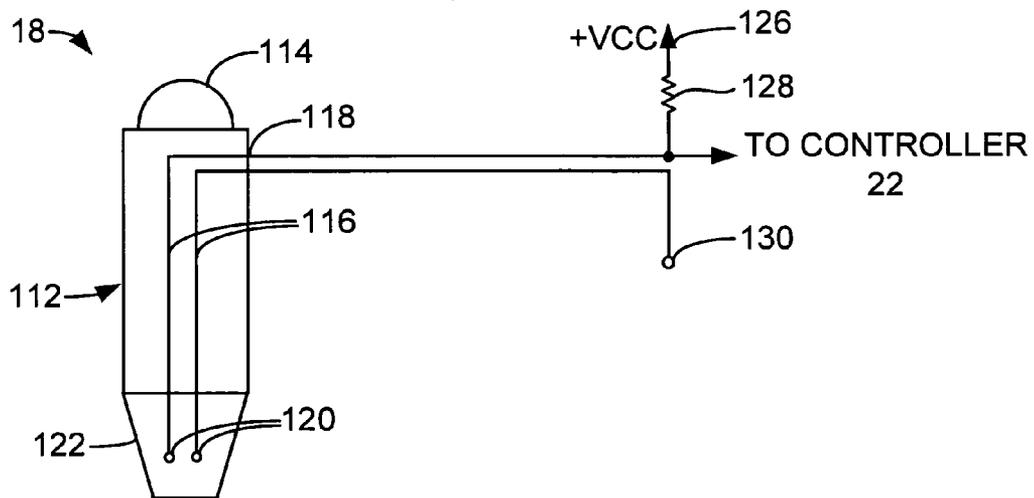


FIG. 6

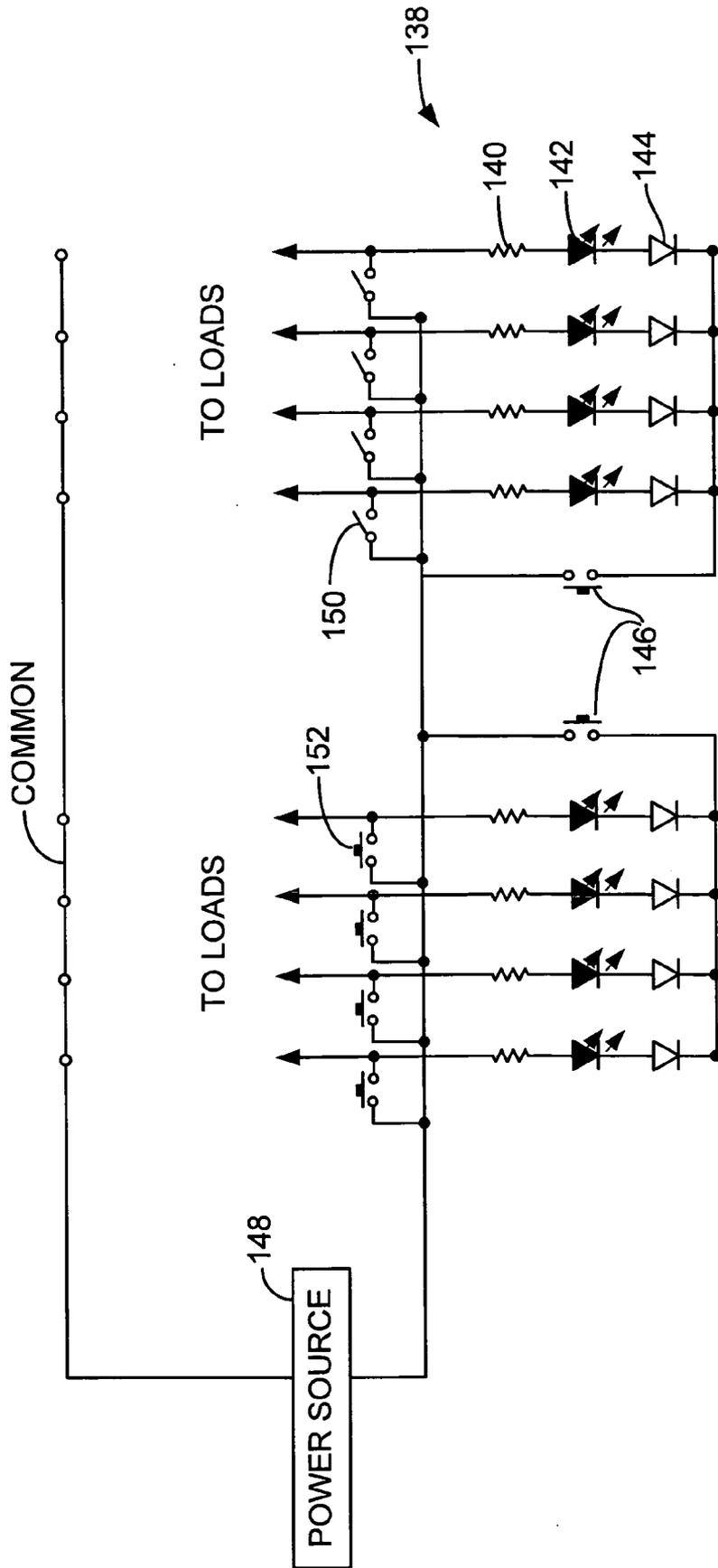


FIG. 7

WATER TIMER AND METHOD

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This patent application claims the benefit of U.S. provisional Patent Application No. 60/664,561, Attorney Docket TIMS 1009-1, entitled Water Timer And Method, filed 23 Mar. 2005. This patent application is related to U.S. Patent Application No. 60/652,128, Attorney Docket TIMS 1010-1, entitled Ambient Environment Sensor for Watering Timer, filed 11 Feb. 2005. This patent application is also related to U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____, Attorney Docket TIMS 1009-3, entitled Water Timer with Watering Plan and Method, filed on the same day as this application.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] Not applicable.

REFERENCE TO MICROFICHE APPENDIX

[0003] Not applicable.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The present invention relates generally to water timers used to control the operation of flow control devices, typically solenoid-actuated valves and pump relays, for watering systems using one or more of sprinkler devices, drip irrigation devices and other watering devices.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0005] Conventional water timers typically require that they be programmed by the user using hardware inputs, for example toggle switches, sliding switches and rotatable knobs, or a combination of hardware inputs and touch screen inputs. The screens are used to display both operational functions and programming values. The user enters commands into the water timer, such as for setting the current time and date and programming the water timer, by pressing keys and/or pressing at appropriate positions on a touch screen display. In many cases an abbreviated set of instructions explaining the steps that must be taken to operate the water timer is printed on a door or cover of the water timer; complete instructions are typically separately documented so that programming such a water timer can be quite confusing and tedious. Also, programming conventional water timers using screen displays is typically accomplished only after selecting a series of different screens on the display. In addition, information relating to the status of the water timer is often accessible only by reviewing different screens on the display.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] A first aspect of the present invention is directed to a user interface for a water timer comprising a user input region. The user input region comprises a plurality of display areas for display of water timer status information, said status information comprising watering zone identifiers and watering duration indicators, a plurality of input areas for user input of water timer inputs, and a touch-sensitive screen so that the user can input water timer inputs by touching the touch-sensitive screen. In some embodiments at least one of the display areas is configured to display a

graphical representation of the watering duration indicators for respective ones of the watering zone identifiers. All of the display areas and input areas may be single-function areas and may be simultaneously visible to and accessible by a user. The display areas may be configured to simultaneously display the graphical representation and a numeric representation of the watering duration indicators for respective ones of the watering zone identifiers.

[0007] A second aspect of the invention is directed to a user interface for a water timer comprising a user input region, the user input region comprising a plurality of display areas for display of water timer status information and a plurality of input areas for user input of water timer inputs. All of the display areas and input areas are single-function areas and are simultaneously visible to and accessible by a user.

[0008] A third aspect of the invention is directed to a user interface for a water timer comprising a user input region, the user input region comprising a plurality of display areas for display of water timer status information, said status information comprising watering zone identifiers and watering duration indicators, and a plurality of input areas for user input of water timer inputs. At least one of the display areas is configured to display a graphical representation of the watering duration indicators for respective ones of the watering zone identifiers.

[0009] A fourth aspect of the invention is directed to a water timer of the type comprising a user interface, a controller coupled to the user interface and programmed to provide control signals for controlling a plurality of flow control devices, each flow control device capable of controlling the passage of water from a water source to a watering zone. The improvement comprises an ambient temperature sensor operably coupled to the controller to sense an ambient temperature and provide an ambient temperature signal to the controller, and an ambient humidity sensor operably coupled to the controller to sense an ambient humidity and provide an ambient humidity signal to the controller. The controller is programmed to store a base temperature and a base humidity; calculate an increase or a decrease in a watering amount according to any differences between the base and ambient temperatures and humidities; and modify the control signals, thereby modifying the amount of water supplied, according to said calculated differences. In some embodiments the controller is programmed to decrease the watering amount according to an amount the ambient humidity is greater than the base humidity, or to increase the watering amount according to an amount the ambient humidity is less than the base humidity. The controller may be programmed to decrease the watering amount according to an amount the ambient temperature is less than the base temperature and to increase the watering amount according to an amount the ambient temperature is greater than the base humidity, respectively.

[0010] A fifth aspect of the invention is directed to a method for automatically adjusting the amount of water supplied by a water timer, the water timer of the type comprising a user interface, a controller coupled to the user interface and programmed to provide control signals for controlling a plurality of flow control devices, each flow control device capable of controlling the passage of water from a water source to a watering zone. The method com-

prises sensing a base ambient temperature and providing a base ambient temperature signal to the controller; sensing a base ambient humidity and providing a base ambient humidity signal to the controller; subsequently sensing a current ambient temperature and providing a current ambient temperature signal to the controller; subsequently sensing a current ambient humidity and providing a current ambient humidity signal to the controller; and modifying control signals, thereby modifying watering amounts, according to the base and current ambient temperature signals and the base and current ambient humidity signals.

[0011] Various features and advantages of the invention will appear from the following description in which the preferred embodiments have been set forth in detail in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] **FIG. 1** is a schematic illustration of a water timer made according to the invention connected flow control devices, the flow control devices coupled to watering lines and a watering source;

[0013] **FIG. 2** illustrates the user interface of the water timer of **FIG. 1**, the user interface including a user input region, the user input region including a touch screen, hardware keys and status lights;

[0014] **FIG. 3** illustrates the touch screen of **FIG. 2** with all of the display areas, input areas and icons being visible for identification purposes;

[0015] **FIG. 4** is an overall view of the rain sensor of **FIG. 1**;

[0016] **FIG. 5** is a cross-sectional view of the rain collection head of the rain sensor of **FIG. 4**;

[0017] **FIG. 6** is a schematic circuit diagram of the rain sensor of **FIGS. 4 and 5**; and

[0018] **FIG. 7** is a simplified, generic version of self-testing circuitry suitable for use with the water timer of **FIGS. 1-3**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0019] The following description of the invention will typically be with reference to specific structural embodiments and methods. It is to be understood that there is no intention to limit the invention to the specifically disclosed embodiments but that the invention may be practiced using other features, elements, methods and embodiments.

[0020] A watering timer made according to embodiments of the present invention may provide one or more of the following advantages. All of the display areas and input areas may be single-function areas. A graphical representation of the watering duration for each watering zone may be provided. This provides the user with an instantaneous, visual graphic (as well as a numeric) indication of the watering duration for each zone for a watering cycle. The controller may be programmed to modify the control signals to the flow control devices according to, for example, the ambient temperature and humidity so that the amount of watering can be adjusted manually or automatically (such as using an automatic system discussed below as the Water

Logic system) accordingly. The controller may also be programmed to permit a user to select input settings for a watering cycle, such as selecting the zone, watering duration, start time and the day or days of the week, in any order and all on the same screen. As used in this application, all on the same screen means that everything needed for setting a watering plan is simultaneously visible; this is possible when all of the display areas and input areas are single-function areas. This flexibility in setting a watering plan can greatly simplify how the user creates a watering plan, the watering plan including one or more watering cycles.

[0021] **FIG. 1** is a schematic illustration of a water timer **10**, comprising a housing **11**, connected to a number of flow control devices **12**, a temperature sensor **14**, a humidity sensor **16** and a rain sensor **18**. Flow control devices **12** may include, for example, solenoid valves, pump relays or a combination thereof. Water timer **10** includes a user interface **20** coupled to a controller **22**. Rainfall signals are provided to controller **22** through a line **23**. In one preferred embodiment temperature sensor **14** and humidity sensor **16** are located within housing **11** with the expectation that water timer **10** will be used outside or within a sheltered area, such as within a garage, but not an area that is heated or cooled. However, if desired one or both of temperature sensor **14** and humidity sensor **16** may be positioned remote from water timer **10**, such as in the vicinity of rain sensor **18**.

[0022] User interface **20** includes a user input region **24**. A water source **26**, such as a municipal water supply, is also connected to flow control devices **12**. Flow control devices **12** control the flow of water from water source **26** to watering lines **28** based upon signals from water timer **10** through signal lines **30**. A master valve **29** is open whenever any of the flow control devices **12** are open. While master valve **29** may not be necessary, it reduces water usage if there are leaks. Without the master valve, there is always pressure to flow control devices **12**. So if there are leaks at any of flow control devices **12**, and/or if one or more of flow control devices **12** are not shutting the water completely off, water will be dribbling out when there is no watering. Also, master valve **29** can be replaced by, for example, a pump solenoid when a pump is used to deliver water along watering lines **28**, typically from a water well; in this case the pump solenoid is typically actuated about one second before any flow control device **12** is actuated.

[0023] While each flow control device **12** in **FIG. 1** is shown to control the flow of water through a single watering line **28**, one or more of flow control devices **12** may be used to control the flow of water through more than one watering line **28**. Watering lines **28** may be a variety of watering lines used for variety of watering purposes. For example, watering lines **28** may have one or more sprinkler heads **31**, or may be used for above ground or below ground drip irrigation using drip irrigation lines **33**. Also, one or more of lines **23**, **30** connecting sensor **18** and flow control devices **12** to water timer **10** may be replaced by radiofrequency or other non-hardwired connections.

[0024] The various features and components of water timer **10** and rain sensor **18** will be discussed first, followed by a discussion of the operation of the water timer.

Structural Details

[0025] **FIG. 2** illustrates one embodiment of a water timer **10** made according to the invention. User input region **24**

includes broadly a touch screen **32**, hardware keys **34** and status lights **36**. User input region **24** provides, as will be discussed in more detail below, a plurality of display areas for display of water timer status information and a plurality of input areas for user input of water timer inputs. One feature of the invention is that all of the display areas and input areas are preferably single-function areas and are simultaneously visible to and accessible by user. This helps to greatly simplify use of water timer **10** by simultaneously providing all information for a particular watering cycle (a watering cycle starting on a designated day(s) and time(s)) to the user without the need for scrolling, moving between different screens, or other conventional operations common with devices in which the display areas and/or input areas are multiple function display and/or input areas used for displaying and/or inputting multiple data entries for the same or different categories of information. A watering plan may include one or more watering cycles.

[0026] Many of the areas on touch screen **32** are touch-sensitive areas used to input information. Other areas on touch screen **32** are display areas used to display information, such as time, temperature, status, etc.; some of the areas do both, that is are touch-sensitive input areas and also are information display areas.

[0027] Touch screen **32** includes numbered zone input areas **38** which are selected by the user pressing on the appropriate zone number which causes the particular zone input area to indicate selection by being surrounded by a line, called being boxed, as illustrated with zones **1-3** and **6-8** in FIG. 2. Zones **1-3** and **6-8** in FIG. 2 are scheduled to be watered beginning with zone **1** at the next start time, discussed below. Each zone input area **38** corresponds to a watering zone **39** watered by a flow control device **12**. Aligned with each zone input area **38** is a watering duration area **40** which provides the user with a quick, graphical visual indication of the watering duration for the particular watering cycle being displayed. A more accurate indication of a particular watering duration (such as 12 minutes) can be accessed in a manner to be discussed below. Below zones input areas **38** are increase and decrease arrow input areas **42, 44** on either side of a date/time display area **46**. Below areas **42, 44, 46** are start time input areas **48** with a corresponding start time display area **50** directly beneath each start time input area **48**. The next start time will typically flash when water timer **10** is unlocked (discussed below). Increase and decrease arrow input areas **42, 44** are used for a number of purposes including selecting watering duration, initially setting the time for display area **46** and selecting or changing start times for a watering cycle.

[0028] Select day input areas **52** are used to select the day or days for a watering cycle for the watering plan. As shown in FIG. 3, input areas **52** include Sunday through Saturday select day input areas **54** and other select day input areas **56**, specifically even days, odd days, second day, third day and 14th day input areas. The even and odd day input areas are possible because controller **22** includes a calendar; this permits the user to automatically comply with even or odd day watering restrictions. The current day, Tuesday in FIG. 2, is boxed.

[0029] To remove a start time, deselect the start time by setting it to off; this is done using arrows **42, 44** to scroll the time at area **46** to between 11:59 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. causing

the start time to be deselected and the word "off" to be displayed at area **46** and at area **50**. To deselect a day, touch the previously-selected input area **52** and it will be deselected as indicated by removal of the box. To remove a zone from a multiple zone watering plan, set the watering zone duration to off (such as through the watering duration area **40** for the selected zone) or by touching target zone input area **38** for the selected zone. To remove a plan, set zone(s) duration to off, or the start times to off and/or deselect all the day(s).

[0030] The next portion of touch screen **32** relates to the use of temperature, humidity and rain sensors **14, 16** and **18**. Water timer **10** is typically programmed so that after a sufficient rainfall, sensed by rain sensor **18**, watering will be suspended, typically for 24 hours. Water timer **10** may also be programmed to provide an automatic adjustment of the amount of watering in each watering cycle according to how much the ambient temperature and humidity differs from a reference temperature and from a reference humidity. This automatic adjustment factor may be referred to as the Water Logic feature or system. As is discussed more in more detail below, if the humidity goes up and/or the temperature goes down from a reference humidity and/or temperature, the amount of watering will be decreased. Conversely, if the humidity goes down and/or the temperature goes up from a reference humidity and/or temperature, the amount of watering will be increased. This portion of touch screen **32** includes an ambient temperature display area **58**, an ambient humidity display area **60**, an ambient environment adjustment icon/input area **61**, also called Water Logic icon/input area **61**, and an adjustment factor display area **62** (which displays the watering adjustment $\pm\%$, also called the delta factor, based upon the ambient temperature and humidity). The automatic ambient environment adjustment feature is activated by pressing on icon/input area **61**. The operation of the Water Logic feature is described below.

[0031] Recognizing that windy days cause things to dry out more quickly, a wind sensor could also be used as a part of the Water Logic feature to permit the watering to be adjusted according to wind speeds. A simply constructed ambient environment sensor that reflects the effect of wind is disclosed in U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/652,128, Attorney Docket TIMS 1010-1, entitled Ambient Environment Sensor for Watering Timer, filed 11 Feb. 2005, the disclosure of which is incorporated by reference.

[0032] Touch screen **32** includes a number of status icons **64**, see FIG. 3, used to provide information regarding the status or operation of water timer **10**. A battery check icon **66** indicates when the internal battery within water timer **10** should be changed; batteries can be used to back up memory in case of AC power loss and for off wall programming. The run/suspend icon **68** will appear when the unit is on (active) but will blink (also called flash) when touched and all watering cycles will be suspended. A 24 VAC icon **70** is visible when the AC adapter voltage is available and blinks (flashes) if missing; 24 VAC typically must be available to run the valves **12**. In addition, the 24 VAC led **96** (see FIG. 2) is on when 24 VAC is available.

[0033] A rain suspend icon **72** will appear when operation of water timer **10** has been suspended due to rain based upon either a signal from rain sensor **18** or a manual rain suspend input, discussed below with regard to hardware keys **34**. The

suspension of operation will typically be for 12 hours, 24 hours, until the start of the next day, or a combination thereof. Preferably, the suspension of operation will be 24 hours. A check mode icon **74** is visible when the user has placed water timer **10** in a check mode, discussed in more detail below, during which each flow control device **12** is operated for a set, typically short, period, such as two minutes, to permit watering in the various watering zones **39** to be checked. A watering can icon **76** is visible whenever water timer **10** signals a flow control device **12** to water its respective watering zone **39**. A lock/unlock icon **78** shows if water timer **10** is in a locked or unlocked state.

[0034] Hardware keys **34**, see FIG. 2, include a run/suspend key **80**. Pressing key **80** suspends the operation of water timer **10** and causes run/suspend icon **68** to blink; pressing key **80** again allows water timer **10** to resume its normal watering functions and causes run/suspend icon **68** to stay on. Touching icon **68** can also be used for run/suspend instead of run/suspend key **80**. Note that status icons **64** are both display areas and are touch-sensitive areas. However, because some of the status icons **64** are typically visible only when the respective task/status is current/active, they will often only be used to deactivate the particular state/task represented by keys **34**. Pressing rain suspend key **82** halts all watering for a set period, such as 12 or 24 hours, after which water timer **10** again resumes its normal watering functions; timer **10** does not go back to pick up any missed watering cycles. Rain suspend icon **72** is visible while watering is suspended (touching rain suspend icon **72** can also be used to halt all watering for a set period).

[0035] Check mode key **84** is typically pressed when the user wants to check the operation of the various watering lines **28**; during a check mode watering cycle each flow control device is actuated for a set, typically two-minute, time period to permit the user to do so. Check mode icon **74** is visible during a check mode watering cycle. Touching check mode icon **74** can also be used for the same purpose as check mode key **84**. The check mode water cycle may be started if water timer **10** is in its run or suspend states. When the check mode key **84** is pushed, all other functions are overridden during the check mode cycle. At the end of the check mode cycle, the timer goes back to previous auto watering mode—run or suspend. When in the check mode, touching check mode key **84** again shuts off the check mode cycle.

[0036] Single watering cycle key **86**, also called the+water hardware key **86**, is pressed to allow the user to put in a single cycle watering plan for extra watering. Touching+water icon **76** can also be used for this purpose. If another watering plan is running, the single watering plan will run and when finished water timer **10** will go back to such watering plan and finish it from that time. Once the user has entered a single cycle watering plan, touching the single watering cycle key **86**, or in some embodiments touching the+water icon **76**, activates the single watering cycle and the single watering plan runs just once. A previously-entered single watering plan remains in memory and can be used or changed at any time.

[0037] Lock/unlock key **88** is used to lock and unlock water timer **10**. Pressing lock/unlock key **88** to place water timer **10** in an unlocked state, indicated by lock/unlock icon **78** in an unlocked configuration, permits full operational

access to the touch sensitive areas and hardware keys for setting watering plans. After the watering plan has been entered into water timer **10**, pressing lock/unlock key **88** or lock/unlock icon **78** will lock the settings. Alternatively, the user can wait for 60 seconds and the system will automatically lock in the last settings.

[0038] Valve check buttons **90**, also called the wire check buttons **90**, one for each zone, directly operate flow control devices **12** to permit the user to check the watering system in the chosen zone. Pressing and holding a button **90** opens the associated flow control device **12**, thus causing watering to begin; releasing the button turns off the water in that zone.

[0039] Valve check buttons **90** allows the user to bypass timer **10** to check the operation of flow control devices **12**. When the user is first wiring the system, buttons **90** are a convenient way to test each device **12**. Once the system has been running, and a flow control device **12** quits operating, the user does not know if water timer **10** is malfunctioning or the flow control device, typically a solenoid valve, is malfunctioning. Wiring check buttons **90** allow the user to make that determination before the user returns water timer **10** as defective.

[0040] Water timer **10** has two rows of status lights **36**, that is connection status lights **92** and watering status lights **94**, with a status light for each flow control device **12** in each row. Connection status lights **92** remain illuminated so long as the wiring for the associated zone is correct; if the wiring for any zone is not correct, the associated connection status lights **92** is not illuminated. Watering status lights **94** are illuminated whenever a valve check button **90** is pressed or controller **22** has provided a watering-on control signal to the associated flow control device **12** to place it in a watering state, and is therefore typically watering, and is not illuminated otherwise.

[0041] Watering can icon **76** is generally visible whenever the system is watering, that is during a watering cycle of the watering plan, during a check mode watering cycle, and during a single watering cycle. It is not visible when valve check button **90** is pressed.

[0042] A 24 VAC status light **96** will come on when the adapter power is properly connected and the internal power breaker is set. If the AC 24V adapter, typically used with water timer **10**, is not connected, status light **96** will not be lighted. All programming functions on the unit can be used on batteries without the AC 24V adapter connected. The 24 VAC adapter must be connected, in a preferred embodiment, to operate the sprinkler valves.

[0043] During a watering cycle, only the watering duration area **40** for the active zone will count down; all others will show their set durations. Watering status light **94** will be illuminated to show that the watering is active for that zone. Only one watering status light **94** would be ON at any one time, plus any pump LED (not shown), which may be used when a pump is used with the system.

[0044] FIGS. 4-6 illustrate a simplified version of rain sensor **18**. Rain sensor **18** includes a mounting bracket **102** to which a support arm **104** is secured at a pivot joint **106**. A rain collection head **108** is mounted to the distal end of support arm **108** at a second pivot joint **110**. Head **108** includes a body **112** covered by a debris filter **114**. Two electrically insulated wire leads **116** extend from an electri-

cal connector **118** and terminate at electrically uninsulated detect points **120**. Detect points **120** are positioned at the upper end **119** of an adjustment screw **121** extending upwardly from the bottom **122** of body **112**. As indicated in **FIG. 6**, a cable **124** connects one of the wire leads **116** to a voltage source **126** through a high resistance resistor **128** and the other wire lead **116** to ground **130**.

[0045] When the water level has reached detect points **120**, controller **22** detects a change in current passing between detect points **120** and is therefore is provided an indication that it is raining. Weep holes **132** are formed body **112** to permit water above the level of weep holes **132** to slowly drain from rain collection head **108**. Therefore, after it has stopped raining, or if it is raining very slowly, water level above weep holes **132** will slowly drop to once again expose detect points **120** thus providing controller **22** with an indication that it has stopped raining.

[0046] Adjustment screw **121** permits the location of detect points **120** to be adjusted relative to weep holes **132**. Adjusting screw **121** so that detect points **120** are above the level of weep holes **132** causes controller **22** sense rain once the water level within body **112** has reached detect points **120**. After the water level has reached detect points **120**, so long as the amount of rain entering body **112** exceeds the amount of rain passing through weep holes **132**, controller **22** will continue to sense rain. The higher the level of detect points **120**, the greater the amount of rain that must be collected before controller **22** senses that it is raining.

[0047] In some situations it may be desired to position detect points **120** below the level of weep holes **132**. After a rain has caused detect points **120** to be immersed in water, the detect points and will remain immersed until the water level has dropped due to, for example, evaporation or manual extraction. If desired, weep holes **132** may be provided at different levels. Also, some or all of the weep holes may be variable restriction weep holes or the user may be provided the option of adding or removing weep holes.

[0048] If water timer **10** is in a run mode, so that run/suspend icon **68** is not blinking, and rain is detected, the timer will go to a suspend mode and the rain suspend icon **72** will come on. When there is no longer rain detected for, in one embodiment, 12 hours, water timer **10** will go back to a run mode, so that the rain suspend icon **72** is off, and continue the watering plans from that point. If rain is again detected during the 12 hours, the rain suspend cycle is restarted. If the blinking rain suspend icon **72** is pushed during the 12 hours following the point in time at which rain is no longer detected, water timer **10** will continue with the watering plans and rain detector **18** will again be enabled after about 1 minute. If rain suspend icon **72** is on, touching rain suspend icon **72** or rain suspend button **82** will stop the rain suspend function until rain is again detected.

[0049] Water timer **10** may be designed to go into a suspend state, during which all watering is terminated, at and below, for example, 40° F. (5° C.). Also, an internal heater may be used to protect touch screen **32** when the temperature goes below, for example, 20° F. (-7° C.).

[0050] **FIG. 7** is a simplified, generic version of test circuitry that can be used with water timer **10**. The basic concept is to disconnect the load(s) (such as flow control solenoids **12**) from a controller, such as controller **22**. This

is typically accomplished by first opening or removing the back plate containing the test circuitry. Two simple tests, discussed below, are accomplished to determine if a perceived problem is a problem with the controller or with the load. The first step uses wiring test circuitry **138**, including a current-limiting resistor **140**, an LED **142** and a diode **144** for each load, and a wiring test button **146**. Closing wiring test button **146** causes each LED **142** connected to its associated load to illuminate only if the load is properly connected to power source **148**. If an LED **142** does not illuminate, there is a problem with the connection of power source **148** to its associated load. Therefore, this test shows that the load is getting power from power source **148**. (The current-limiting resistor **146** sufficiently large to limit the amount of current supplied to the load to prevent actuation of the load during this first test.) Assuming the load is getting power from power source **148**, the user proceeds to the second test. The second test is accomplished by actuating the function test switch/button **150, 152** of a second, test function circuit **154** to "turn on" the load by connecting the load to power source **148**; if the load does not operate as expected (for example, the flow control device **12** does not operate to allow water to flow through the associated watering line **28**), the problem is with the load, not controller **22**, because the load is properly connected to power source **148**. If the load does operate as expected, then the perceived problem is with controller **22**. This test circuitry can be particularly useful for troubleshooting a perceived problem with controller **22** during a telephone service call. Actuating a test switch/button **150, 152** is similar to pressing a valve check button **90**.

Operational Details

[0051] A basic goal of the invention is to strive to have the ability to set the watering plan any way the user wishes. This gives the user maximum flexibility. The system strives to be seamless, i.e. a user should be able to set the watering plan as user believes appropriate, not as a particular protocol demands. Having all the necessary information and controls on a single touch screen helps to achieve this goal.

[0052] One aspect of the invention is the recognition that there are four basic selection that must be made for a single watering plan: day, start time, zone and watering duration. In a preferred embodiment the user can select these in any order. In other embodiments there may be some restriction on the order of selection. For example, in one embodiment a start time must be selected before the zone and duration are selected, while the day can be selected at any time; also, in this embodiment either (1) the zone is first selected, by touching the appropriate zone input area **38**, and then the duration for the selected zone is selected using either input areas **42, 44** or watering duration areas **40**, or (2) the zone is automatically and simultaneously selected by touching the appropriate watering duration area **40** for that zone.

[0053] With the present invention the user can choose to use different types of watering plans. Two examples of watering plans are called the zone based watering plan and the start time based watering plan. Briefly, in a zone based watering plan the user selects the watering duration for each zone, the watering select start time(s), and what days are to be watered. With a start time based watering plan each start time can have different zone durations and different days. The objective is to be able to water a zone with different

durations in, for example, the morning and evening, i.e. one duration per zone per start time, for maximum versatility. The following, based upon one embodiment of the invention, summarizes procedures followed with two types of watering plans. Other embodiments may result in somewhat different procedures.

Watering Plans—Basic Procedure

[0054] Press lock/unlock button **88** or lock/unlock icon **78** to unlock water timer **10** to permit the watering plan to be entered. Start time input area **48** for start time **1**, also called the first start time, flashes. (If a different start time is desired, such as input area **48** for start time **3**, the appropriate input area **48** is pressed and will flash.) The start time is set by pressing on arrows **42**, **44**, such as by using a stylus (not shown), to advance and roll back the time in display area **46** until the start time is displayed. Touch a zone number at zone input areas **38** to select a zone; the selected zone is boxed and flashes. The duration for the selected zone is then set by either touching the appropriate position along the water duration area **40** for the selected zone or by using increase arrow **42**, and decrease arrow **44** if necessary. In either event, the watering duration will be illustrated graphically along area **40** in a manner similar to a bar graph and by a numeric indication at date/time display area **46**. Select and set the desired day or days for the selected start time by pressing one, some or all of the day input areas **54** or by pressing one of the other selected day input areas **56**. The appropriate area(s) **54**, **56** will be boxed and blink.

[0055] In the disclosed embodiment if a start time for the selected start time input and display areas **48**, **50** has not been previously entered, a start time must be entered for such selected start time input and display areas **48**, **50** before the duration for any zone for that selected start time can be entered. Except for this minor limitation with some embodiments (which will typically occur only when water timer **10** is first used), a user can input original information for a watering plan or changes to a watering plan (zones, days, start times, durations) in any order. Also, each start time has the same day(s) selection from input areas **54**, **56** for any and all zones. In the disclosed embodiment water timer **10** has been programmed so that only a single flow control device **12** will be operational at any one time. Therefore, when multiple zones are selected for the same start time, or if there is an overlap of start times, the zones will be watered one at a time in numerical order. Other embodiments may permit two or more flow control devices to be a simultaneously operational so that there may be watering overlap for this reason as well.

Zone Based Watering Plan

[0056] Following the Basic Procedure above, a user can store the watering plan for the selected zone by touching the next desired zone. The blinking zones **38**, start times **50** and days **52** will all go off. A different zone can then be selected and a new watering plan can be entered for that zone. Note that the user can touch each zone input area **38** to open it, to initially set, review or change information relating to that zone. Touching zone input area **38** again stores that zone's watering plan. When finished, lock/unlock key **88** is pressed to lock water timer **10** and returned to the run mode.

Zone/Start Time Based Watering Plan

[0057] Following the Basic Procedure described above, a user can proceed by selecting and setting a new start time.

The Basic Procedure is then repeated for the new start time. This procedure can be repeated for other start times up to, in the disclosed embodiment, 5 start times. To apply (store) each zone's watering plan, touch the next desired zone. Each start time can have different durations and days for each zone. Each zone can have different durations for each start time. When finished, lock/unlock key **88** is pressed to lock water timer **10** and returned to the run mode.

Water Logic (Ambient Environment System)

[0058] When the water logic icon/input area **61** is touched, in one preferred embodiment for 3 seconds, the present readings of humidity at humidity display area **60** and temperature at temperature display area **58** will be set as the 0% reference, i.e. the starting point. These starting points are also referred to as the base ambient temperature and the base ambient humidity. The following percentage increases and decreases in watering time are exemplary for one preferred embodiment.

[0059] If humidity goes up, the watering will be decreased by the same percentage. (+1%=-1%) If humidity goes down, the watering will increase by the same percentage. (-1%=+1%) The % increase or decrease in the watering time is called the delta. When temperature goes up, the watering will increase by, for example, 4% per degree F. Example, 70 F to 95 F =+25 F, at 4% per degree F., the delta will go from 0% to +100%. (+1 F=+4%) When temperature goes down, the watering will decrease -4% per degree -F. Example, 70 F to 45 F is -25 F, at -4% per degree F., the delta will go from 0% to -100%. (-1 F=-4%) Other % per degree F. may be used, preferably between 1% to 10% per degree F. In the disclosed embodiment the temperature and humidity deltas are fixed in controller **22**; other embodiments may be constructed to permit the user to adjust the temperature and humidity deltas.

[0060] Using international units, when the temperature goes up, the watering will increase by, for example, 7.2% per degree C. Example, 21° C. to 35° C.=+14° C., at 7.2% per degree C., the delta will go from 0% to +100%. (+1 C=+7.2%) When temperature goes down, the watering will decrease -7.2% per degree C. Example, 21° C. to 7.2° C. is -13.8° C., at -7.2% per degree C., the delta will go from 0% to -100%. (-1 F=-7.2%) Other % per degree C. may be used, preferably between 1.8% to 18% per degree C.

[0061] Because the temperature and humidity vary considerably in different parts of the country, and across seasons, is preferred if the user can easily set and/or reset a starting point. Initially, when the user touches water logic icon **61**, the starting point (0% change) is whatever the temperature and humidity are at that time of day, for example 2:00 p.m., sometimes referred to as the chosen time of day. The initially sensed ambient temperature and humidity are sometimes referred to as the base ambient temperature and the base ambient humidity. Until the user initially touches water logic input area **61**, the water logic feature will not activate. The delta change for the next watering cycle will be dependent on the base temperature and the base humidity. The base temperature and base humidity, in this embodiment, stays the same but is compared against the current temperature and humidity each day at, in this example, 2:00 PM as long as the water logic feature is on. The base temperature and the base humidity are set and do not change so long as the water logic feature is active. In

other embodiments the base temperature and the base humidity may change every day, or every other day, or every week, etc. In either event delta changes, in the preferred embodiment, will be effective for the next 24 hours. The temperature and humidity measured for purposes of computing the delta changes are measured each day at the chosen time of day, again in this example 2:00 PM. To shut off the water logic function, the user touches icon **61** again and it toggles off.

EXAMPLE

[0062] At 2 p.m. (the chosen time of day) the user touches water logic input area **61** and the water logic function becomes operational. The present temperature is reading 70 F (the base ambient temperature) and present humidity reading is 40% (the base ambient humidity) so these values will define the starting point (0% delta).

[0063] Some days later the weather changed, three examples:

[0064] 1. The temperature went from 70° F. to 90° F. (21° C. to 32° C.) and the humidity stayed at 40% at 2 p.m.; the watering would be increased by 80% (+4% change per degree +F.) (+7.2% change per degree +C.) so that the display area **62** would display a delta of +80%.

[0065] 2. The temperature stayed at 70° F. (21° C.) and the humidity went from 40% to 80% at 2 p.m.; the watering would be decreased by 40% (-1% change per +1% humidity).

[0066] 3. The temperature went from 70° F. to 90° F. (21° C. to 32° C.) and the humidity went from 40% to 80% at 2 p.m.; the watering would be increased by 40% (+80% temperature delta -40% humidity delta).

[0067] The delta (adjustment) factor is on screen display area **62** only when the water logic function is on. This permits the user to watch the delta factor at display area **62**, learn how it works and determine if and when the user wants to use the water logic function. Using the water logic function the user can accurately determine and change the starting point when needed by watching the temperature, humidity, and delta factor all at the same time, anytime.

[0068] In the disclosed embodiment the base temperature and base humidity are the sensed ambient temperature and humidity. In some embodiments it may be desired to allow the user, or the manufacturer, to input a base temperature and base humidity against which the current base ambient temperature and base ambient humidity are compared.

[0069] The watering adjustments are typically discussed with regard to changing the length of time of watering. However, the amount of water discharged in a watering cycle can also be adjusted by changing the rate of water discharge, such as by changing the water pressure applied to watering lines **28**, or by both changing the watering time and the rate of discharge.

[0070] Other modification and variation can be made to the above disclosed embodiments without departing from the subject of the invention as defined by the following claims. For example, the number of zones, the number of start times, and the 12- or 24-hour rain delay may be changed from those discussed above. The system may be designed to operate on battery power only. Valves **12**, or

other flow control devices, may be of types that operate on other than 24 VAC, such as DC and other AC voltages.

[0071] Any and all patents, patent applications, and printed publications referred to above are incorporated by reference.

1. A user interface for a water timer comprising:

a user input region comprising:

a plurality of display areas for display of water timer status information, said status information comprising watering zone identifiers and watering duration indicators;

a plurality of input areas for user input of water timer inputs; and

a touch-sensitive screen so that the user can input water timer inputs by touching the touch-sensitive screen.

2. The user interface according to claim 1 wherein at least one of the display areas is configured to display a graphical representation of the watering duration indicators for respective ones of the watering zone identifiers.

3. The user interface according to claim 2 wherein all of the display areas and input areas are single-function areas and are simultaneously visible to and accessible by a user.

4. The user interface according to claim 2 wherein the display areas are configured to simultaneously display the graphical representation and a numeric representation of the watering duration indicators for respective ones of the watering zone identifiers.

5. A user interface for a water timer comprising:

a user input region comprising:

a plurality of display areas for display of water timer status information; and

a plurality of input areas for user input of water timer inputs; and

all of the display areas and input areas being single-function areas and being simultaneously visible to and accessible by a user.

6. The user interface according to claim 5 wherein the user input region comprises a touch-sensitive screen.

7. The user interface according to claim 5 wherein the user input region comprises a touch-sensitive screen and hardware keys.

8. A user interface for a water timer comprising:

a user input region comprising:

a plurality of display areas for display of water timer status information, said status information comprising watering zone identifiers and watering duration indicators; and

a plurality of input areas for user input of water timer inputs; and

at least one of the display areas configured to display a graphical representation of the watering duration indicators for respective ones of the watering zone identifiers.

9. The user interface according to claim 8 wherein the watering duration indicators are touch-sensitive indicators capable of being changed by touching.

10. The user interface according to claim 8 wherein the input areas comprise a numeric input area coupled to the watering duration indicators capable of changing the watering duration indicators based upon numeric inputs to the numeric input area.

11. The user interface according to claim 8 wherein the display areas are configured to simultaneously display the graphical representation and a numeric representation of the watering duration indicators for respective ones of the watering zone identifiers.

12. A water timer of the type comprising a user interface, a controller coupled to the user interface and programmed to provide control signals for controlling a plurality of flow control devices, each flow control device capable of controlling the passage of water from a water source to a watering zone, the improvement comprising:

an ambient temperature sensor operably coupled to the controller to sense an ambient temperature and provide an ambient temperature signal to the controller;

an ambient humidity sensor operably coupled to the controller to sense an ambient humidity and provide an ambient humidity signal to the controller; and

the controller programmed to:

store a base temperature and a base humidity;

calculate an increase or a decrease in a watering amount according to any differences between the base and ambient temperatures and humidities; and

modify the control signals, thereby modifying the amount of water supplied, according to said calculated differences.

13. A water timer according to claim 12 wherein the controller is programmed to decrease the watering amount according to an amount the ambient humidity is greater than the base humidity, or to increase the watering amount according to an amount the ambient humidity is less than the base humidity.

14. A water timer according to claim 12 wherein the controller is programmed to decrease the watering amount according to an amount the ambient temperature is less than the base temperature and to increase the watering amount according to an amount the ambient temperature is greater than the base humidity, respectively.

15. A water timer according to claim 14 wherein the humidity is expressed as a percentage from 0 to 100%, and wherein said amount is equal to X times the percentage that the ambient humidity, expressed as a percentage, is less than or greater than the base humidity.

16. A water timer according to claim 15 wherein X ranges from about 1 to 4 and wherein the amount is about 1% to 10% per degree Fahrenheit difference between the base and ambient temperatures.

17. A method for automatically adjusting the amount of water supplied by a water timer, the water timer of the type comprising a user interface, a controller coupled to the user

interface and programmed to provide control signals for controlling a plurality of flow control devices, each flow control device capable of controlling the passage of water from a water source to a watering zone, the method comprising:

sensing a base ambient temperature and providing a base ambient temperature signal to the controller;

sensing a base ambient humidity and providing a base ambient humidity signal to the controller;

subsequently sensing a current ambient temperature and providing a current ambient temperature signal to the controller;

subsequently sensing a current ambient humidity and providing a current ambient humidity signal to the controller; and

modifying control signals, thereby modifying watering amounts, according to the base and current ambient temperature signals and the base and current ambient humidity signals.

18. The method according to claim 17 wherein the base ambient temperature and humidity sensing steps are carried out at a chosen time of day on a chosen day and the subsequently sensing steps are carried out on at least one day following the chosen day at a time corresponding to said chosen time of day.

19. The method according to claim 18 further comprising selecting the time corresponding to the chosen time of day to be the same time of day.

20. The method according to claim 17 wherein:

the humidity is expressed as a percentage from 0 to 100%; and

the control signals modifying step:

decreases the watering amount according to an amount equal to X times the percentage that the ambient humidity is greater than the base humidity;

increases the watering amount according to an amount equal to Y times the percentage that the ambient humidity is less than the base humidity;

decreases the watering amount according to an amount L the ambient temperature is less than the base temperature; and

increases the watering amount according to an amount G the ambient temperature is greater than the base temperature.

21. The method according to a 20 wherein the control signals modifying step is carried out with X and Y each ranging from about 1 to 4 and wherein the amounts L and G are each about 1% to 10% per degree Fahrenheit difference between the base and ambient temperatures.

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