

How to Choose an Irrigation Contractor

A Guide for Property Owners

Whistler Irrigation Services Ltd. — Established 1988

INTRODUCTION

Your irrigation system is one of the more consequential investments on your property. Designed and installed well, it protects your landscape, conserves water, and operates reliably for decades. Managed poorly — or by a contractor without the right training and credentials — it can waste thousands of litres of water, damage your landscaping, and create compliance problems.

This guide is intended to help you ask the right questions, understand what separates qualified irrigation professionals from general landscapers or handymen offering irrigation as a sideline, and make a confident decision.

1. Credentials and Certification

Irrigation in British Columbia is regulated through the Irrigation Industry Association of BC (IIABC). Contractors who meet the training, examination, and experience requirements can apply for Certified Contractor status. Certification is not automatic — it requires demonstrated knowledge of hydraulics, scheduling, water management, and local code compliance.

Look for:

- IIABC Certified Contractor designation
- Valid BC business licence and WorkSafeBC coverage
- Liability insurance appropriate for commercial and residential work
- Backflow prevention: certified testers on staff with calibrated instruments

Ask to see documentation. Any reputable contractor will provide it without hesitation. If a contractor is unable or unwilling to provide proof of certification, that is a meaningful signal.

2. Equipment Quality

Not all irrigation equipment is equivalent. Systems built with lower-grade components may cost less upfront but require more frequent repairs, waste more water, and have shorter service lives. The equipment your contractor specifies reflects their standards and their commitment to your long-term outcome.

Rain Bird Select Contractor Status

Rain Bird is the world's leading manufacturer of irrigation equipment, and their Select Contractor program is extended to a small, hand-chosen group of contractors they consider among the best in the business. Select Contractors must adhere to Rain Bird's code of professional conduct, submit work for quality review, maintain factory-trained certification, and use only products appropriate to each site.

For clients, this translates into extended Rain Bird warranties of 3 and 5 years, priority access to factory-trained technical support, and the assurance that your system was built by a contractor Rain Bird itself has vetted.

3. The Service Program — What Good Looks Like

Installation is only the beginning. A well-maintained irrigation system requires skilled, attentive seasonal management. When evaluating a contractor, ask specifically about their service program.

Spring Startup	Season Monitoring	Winterization
The water supply is re-activated and the entire system tested — controller functions, zones, heads, and minor repairs — before the season begins.	The system is programmed, operated, and regularly inspected throughout the season. Scheduling is adjusted for weather and plant needs to maximise efficiency and avoid over- or under-watering.	Before the first freeze, all water is purged from the system using compressed air. This is the single most important step in preventing freeze damage to pipes, heads, and valves.

A contractor who only offers installation — with no structured service program — may leave you responsible for tasks that require specialist knowledge and calibrated equipment. Ask upfront whether they offer a contracted, full-season service agreement.

4. Backflow Prevention — Your Responsibility

As a property owner or manager, you are legally responsible for ensuring your property does not contaminate the municipal water supply through backflow. Backflow prevention assemblies are required by regulation on all irrigation systems connected to the municipal supply — and they must be tested annually by a Certified Active Tester using calibrated instruments.

Annual testing is not optional. The required documentation must be filed with the local authority. If your contractor cannot test, certify, and file on your behalf, you will need to hire a separate certified tester each year. A full-service irrigation contractor should be able to handle this as part of your service agreement.

5. Questions to Ask Before You Hire

Use the following questions when evaluating any irrigation contractor.

Q: Are you an IIABC Certified Contractor?

Certification requires demonstrated knowledge of hydraulics, water management, and BC regulations. Uncertified contractors may not be aware of — or compliant with — local requirements.

Q: Are you a Rain Bird Select Contractor?

Select status is by invitation only. It signals a commitment to quality installation, ongoing training, and professional standards — and provides clients with extended warranties.

Q: Do you have certified backflow testers on staff?

Annual testing is a legal requirement. A contractor who cannot test and file on your behalf creates an additional obligation for you each season.

Q: Do you offer a full-season service contract?

Spring startup, regular monitoring and programming adjustments, and proper winterization require expertise. Ask what is included and what is billed separately.

Q: How long have you operated in this area?

Local experience matters. Soil conditions, climate patterns, municipal water supply pressures, and landscape types in Whistler and the Sea to Sky corridor differ from urban settings. A contractor with years of local experience brings knowledge that cannot be learned from a manual.

Q: Can you provide references from comparable properties?

A reputable contractor should be able to connect you with existing clients on similar commercial or residential properties.

6. Red Flags

Be cautious if a contractor:

- Cannot provide proof of IIABC certification, licensing, or insurance

- Does not offer a structured seasonal service program
- Uses generic or unbranded components without explanation
- Provides a quote significantly lower than others — often a signal of lower-grade materials, shortcuts in installation, or a lack of the overhead that comes with proper credentials and insurance
- Has no established presence or track record in the local area
- Is unwilling or unable to discuss backflow testing, controller programming, or seasonal commissioning procedures in specific terms

About Whistler Irrigation Services Ltd.

Founded in 1988, Whistler Irrigation Services combines manufacturer-level technical expertise with long-standing local experience. We are the only irrigation contractor resident in Whistler, having designed and installed more than 1,000 systems across the Sea to Sky corridor and serving over 1,300 clients on a full-service seasonal basis.

We are an IIABC Certified Contractor, a Rain Bird Select Contractor, and maintain certified Active Testers on staff for backflow prevention. Our team also designs and installs commercial and residential low-voltage lighting systems.

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