Watering Your Landscape More Efficiently

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Efficient watering and practicing Florida-Friendly landscaping principles are the first steps towards water conservation. Studies have estimated that over 50-60% of a homeowner's water use is applied to their landscape. Of that, 1/3 of that water use is estimated to be wasted. By following the suggested guidelines, the average homeowner can dramatically cut down on wasted water use in the landscape.

- Water on an as-needed-basis. Water only when the landscape needs it. Adjust irrigation during the time of season and the amount of rainfall present. Irrigation should decrease during the cooler months because turf and landscape plants go semi-dormant. For Central Florida, lawns should only need to be watered every 10 days.
- Use a rain gauge to measure the amount of rainfall that occurs weekly to avoid any unnecessary watering. For example, if more than 1” of rain occurs during the week, then delay watering for that week.
- Water trees and shrubs when early signs of wilting occur.
- Look for signs when turf grass needs to be watered. If grass blades start to fold in, then irrigate. If you mow or walk across the lawn and still see tracks a short time later, then irrigate. If the grass blades spring up, then hold off on watering turf grass for that week.
- Apply ½”-3/4” of water when irrigating. Use the “catch-can” test to properly calibrate the amount of water used.
- Follow local watering restrictions. Sumter County is under once a week watering restrictions imposed by the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Visit watermatters.org for information on days when to water.
- Choose drought tolerant Florida Friendly plants. Many Florida Friendly plants are drought tolerant. Select plants that only thrive on rainfall.
- Irrigate your turf separately from trees and shrubs. Trees and shrubs have different watering needs than turf grass when established.
- Learn how to operate your irrigation controller. Know how to properly set your start times and run times to water more efficiently.
• Water between 4-7 a.m. Watering before 4 a.m. will increase your risk of plant diseases. Watering too late in the day will result in water being lost to evaporation or wind drift.
• Use a drip or micro-spray irrigation system in shrub or planting beds. Water is applied directly to the soil reducing runoff, evaporation and foliar plant diseases.
• Install a rain shutoff device. Installing rain sensors or soil moisture sensors will aid in greater water conservation and will help reduce the costs of watering bills. Check your soil moisture or rain sensor every year to make sure it is working correctly.
• Make sure your irrigation system distributes water in a uniform pattern. Clean out clogged filters inside sprinkler heads that may affect the distribution and pattern of your irrigation system.
• Check regularly for leaks and broken heads. Most irrigation systems operate when homeowners are asleep; manually turn on the irrigation system to check for any malfunctions.

Additional Resources:
Websites
UF IFAS Sumter County Extension http://www.sumter.ifas.ufl.edu
Solutions for Your Life http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu
Florida Automated Weather Network http://fawn.ifas.ufl.edu
Fact Sheets
Coping with Drought in the Landscape http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG026
How to Calibrate Your Sprinkler System http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH026
Watering Your Florida Lawn http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH025
Irrigating Landscape Plants During Establishment http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP113
Operation of Residential Irrigation Controllers http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AE220
Retrofitting a Traditional In-ground Sprinkler Irrigation System for Microirrigation of Landscape Plants http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AE222