

Manage landscape irrigation during dry weather

Up to one-half of public water supply in Florida is devoted to landscape irrigation. Wise irrigation practices will play an essential role in providing a sustainable water future for our state.

During dry weather, implement the following water management practices to improve your landscapes water efficiency.

Mulching helps conserve water. On bare ground about sixty percent of the water can be lost through evaporation. A two to three inch layer of mulch will help hold onto the water so the plants can use it. Try to mulch a large portion of a plant's root zone by applying mulch all the way around the plant out to the end of the branches.

When watering, a thorough soaking to wet the soil to a depth of six to eight inches is much better for plants than light frequent watering. Three to five gallons of water applied to one spot under the canopy of trees or shrubs should thoroughly saturate the root zone in that location. During dry periods (as a general rule), twenty-five percent of the root system, when watered thoroughly, can absorb all the water a plant requires at any given time.

In watering a lawn, apply one to two inches of water per week when we are not getting rain. Although most sprinklers have irrigation rates of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch per hour, some may apply up to one inch per hour. Measure your irrigation rate and uniformity by placing several open-top containers of the same size under the sprinkler and see how long it takes to apply a known amount of water such as $\frac{1}{2}$ inch.

An efficient irrigation program on turf should not begin until the lawn shows signs of moisture stress. Symptoms include a dull and bluish-green color and leaf blades folding. The most efficient time to irrigate is between sunset and sunrise because of less evaporation, less wind and lower temperatures. Early morning is the next most effective time to irrigate while midday is the least efficient.

Avoid fertilizing drought-stressed plants. Fertilizers are chemical salts and will dehydrate roots when water is in short supply. If you need to apply a pesticide, make certain the plant is not wilted at the time and spray during early morning or late afternoon. Avoid unnecessary pruning of plants during drought. Pruning encourages new growth which has a high demand for water.

For more information on watering efficiently and drought tolerant plants, contact your UF/IFAS County Extension Office or visit the following web sites.

<http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu>

<http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>

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