**Making water count in the landscape**

There are a number of things you can do to help make your landscape more water efficient without having to resort to the extreme of nothing but cacti and rocks.

Water conservation is an important issue facing Floridians today. As much as sixty percent of all household water use during the summer months is used outdoors. Unfortunately, much of this water is wasted by people who don't know how to water and when to water.

Proper landscape planning and design are the keys to a more water efficient landscape. An efficient water use design includes dividing the landscape into three water-use zones: low, medium and high.

Low water-use zones require little to no supplemental water after establishment. Moderate water-use zones contain those plants that require some supplemental irrigation during hot, dry periods. High water-use zones should be limited in the landscape to small high-impact or most visible areas of the home such as the entrance.

Because a shaded landscape helps cool the landscape by as much as twenty degrees and reduces water loss, it is an important design concept.

Use practical turf areas. Locate turfgrass in areas of the landscape where it will provide the most functional benefit such as recreational areas or on slopes to prevent erosion. Separate turfgrasses from ornamental plants in the landscape so they can be watered separately. Most turfgrasses can be located in any of the three water-use zones but the amount and frequency of irrigation should be adjusted accordingly.

Only water plants that need to be watered. An irrigation system is nothing more than a tool to supplement rainfall, not to water in addition to rainfall. Most established ornamental plants and turfgrasses can survive long, dry periods without supplemental irrigation. Daily watering is bad for plants. It encourages shallow root systems and causes plants to demand more water.

Midday watering of turf areas is not recommended because much of the applied water can be lost due to evaporation and wind blowing the water off site. Water between 9:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. to minimize evaporation and foliar diseases.

Consider use of drip or micro-irrigation in ornamental plant beds, vegetable garden and fruit garden areas. Drip or micro-irrigation uses less water and is more efficient than traditional irrigation systems.

Mulch is vital to a water-efficient landscape. Mulch helps conserve soil moisture and keeps the root area cooler during hot, dry weather. A two to three inch layer of organic mulch such as pine straw, pine bark mini-nuggets or woodchips helps create a more water efficient landscape.
Try to match the right plant for the site conditions and preserve as many of the native plants as possible. Native plants are generally well adapted to the environment and may require no supplemental irrigation.

During dry weather, mowing turfgrasses so that no more than 1/3 of the leaf tissue is removed at each mowing will reduce plant stress and water demand. Reduce fertilization during dry weather because it can damage plant roots in dry soils.

For additional water saving ideas, contact your local University of Florida Extension Office or visit the following UF/IFAS Websites.

http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Lawn_Watering

http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Landscape_Irrigation

http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu

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