

# Saving Water Outdoors

**Use what you need,  
need what you use**

Water is one of our most precious resources. Because it flows so easily from our faucets, most of us don't appreciate its value. As a result, many of us become water wasters — especially when it comes to outdoor water use. Typically, outdoor water use accounts for up to 50 percent of water consumed by households. You can reduce your outdoor water consumption by taking a few simple steps. So tighten those taps, eliminate those leaks and use water wisely.

## **Seek the Leak**

Did you know that even a small leak can waste 300 or more gallons of water per month? Check for the following leaks outdoors:

### ***Water Faucets, Hoses and Connectors***

Check all faucets, hoses and connectors periodically for leaks and to make sure they are in good working order. Make sure faucets are closed when not in use. If you do find a leaky faucet, change the washer — after turning off the shutoff valve.

### ***Automatic Lawn and Sprinkling Systems***

Soft, wet spots on your lawn around the in-ground sprinkler could indicate a leak that is being absorbed into the ground. Contact your plumber or landscape maintenance specialist if repairs are needed.

### ***Swimming Pool***

Check the pool system's shutoff valve, which works automatically, to see if it is malfunctioning and causing a continuous cycle of water to

be pumped in and then drained out. If the water level stays higher than normal and it overflows when people are using it, call your plumber.

### ***Service Connecting Line***

If you find a soft, wet spot on your lawn or hear the sound of running water outside your house, you may have a leak in the service line to your house. Water soaks into the ground, causing the soft spots. Close the main shutoff valve. If the sound of running water continues, the outside service line could be leaking. Contact your plumber if you detect wet spots.



# Outdoor irrigation

## Irrigation

### **How often should I water?**

Know and follow your local watering restrictions, but don't water just because it's your day. The basic principle of lawn and garden watering is not to overwater. The time to irrigate will vary depending on your soil type and your location in the state.

Irrigate your lawn when it shows signs of stress from lack of water. Pay attention to signs of stressed grass, such as a bluish-gray color, lingering tire tracks or footprints, and leaf blades that are folded in half lengthwise. Also, you can determine if your lawn needs water by measuring soil moisture.

Sophisticated soil moisture sensors will turn on your automatic irrigation system when water is needed. The more basic soil moisture sensors turn off your system when water is adequate. Reliable soil moisture sensor technology is currently available in irrigation supply stores.

### **What time of day should I water?**

Evaporation loss can be 60 percent higher during the day, so water during the cool, early morning hours to minimize water loss by evaporation and to discourage disease. Avoid watering on windy days.



### **How long should I water?**

Apply moderate amounts of water to create a healthy, drought- and stress-tolerant lawn. For most Florida soils, an average of one-half to three-quarters of an inch of water per application is enough to replenish the

grass. Saturate the root zone, then let soil dry to encourage healthy, deep root growth.

To determine how long you should run your sprinkler, place five to seven empty straight-edged cans (about the size of an average tuna can) at different distances away from the sprinkler. Run the sprinkler for 15 minutes and measure the amount of water collected in each can. Calculate an average water depth and determine how long it will take to apply one-half to three-quarters of an inch of water.

If you have an automatic sprinkler system, be sure it is equipped with a working rain shutoff device, which overrides the system when enough rain has fallen. It automatically resets the system when the turf requires more water. Rain shutoff devices are required by Florida law on all automatic sprinkler systems installed since 1991. Check regularly to ensure the device is working properly and that the corresponding switch in the control box is set at "on."



## Irrigation Methods

Drip irrigation is the most efficient method of watering for non-turf areas such as bedded plants, trees or shrubs. Drip systems minimize or eliminate evaporation, impede weed growth, and may help prevent grass diseases caused by underwatering or overwatering.

Soaker hoses are an inexpensive alternative to drip irrigation. Soil moisture should be monitored to determine when enough water has been applied.



If using a hose and sprinkler, place the sprinkler in the area that is driest. Allow the sprinkler to run the proper length of time to apply one-half to three-quarters of an inch of water. When that area is complete, move the sprinkler to another dry area. Place the sprinkler so that its water spray will overlap

the area previously watered. Adjust the hose or sprinkler until it waters just the grass or shrubs, not paved areas.

Inground irrigation systems can be automatic or manual, or a combination. The automatic system can provide an efficient method of irrigating lawns because controllers turn the system off after a predetermined amount of time, so a measured amount of water is applied. Learn how to operate your system. Check timing devices regularly to make sure they are operating properly. Watch for broken or misdirected sprinklers.

Use the appropriate sprinkler head for the irrigated area. Install sprinklers that are the most water-efficient for each use. Rotors or spray heads are good for turf areas, but shouldn't be used in the same zone. For even distribution, flow rates must be consistent throughout the zone.



# Lawn care

## Fertilization

Apply fertilizers sparingly, using those that contain slow-release, water-insoluble forms of nitrogen. Fertilizer applications depend on such factors as grass species, soil type and permeability, and your location in the state. To save water and to avoid thatch buildup, disease and excessive growth, follow these University of Florida-recommended practices:

- Fertilize in moderation. More is not necessarily better. Read and follow all fertilizer label instructions.
- For Bahiagrass, apply 2 to 3 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year in the northern part of Florida, and 2 to 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet in the central and southern areas of Florida. For St. Augustinegrass, annual nitrogen needs range from 2 to 4 pounds in the north, 2 to 5 pounds in the central area and 4 to 6 pounds in the south. For specifics in your area, contact your local county Extension service.
- Fertilize only during the growing season. Allow a month between autumn application and the time of freeze, if possible, allowing new growth to harden off and become less vulnerable to frost.
- Feed in the spring with a complete micronutrient fertilizer.
- Use a 1:1 ratio of nitrogen to potassium (first and last numbers on the bag). Test for phosphorus; apply only if lacking. Florida soil is naturally high in phosphorus, so ideal fertilizer is 15-0-15; if not available, use 16-4-8.
- Use pesticides only when needed and just on affected areas.



- Do not apply fertilizer when more than 1 inch of rainfall is predicted in the next 48 hours. Leaching and runoff of nutrient-contaminated water may occur.

## Mowing

Cut your grass at the highest recommended height for your turf species, or the highest setting on your lawn mower. Mow regularly, cutting no more than one-third of the grass length to encourage grass roots to grow deeper and grass blades to hold moisture.

Keep mower blades sharp. Dull blades tear grass, opening it to disease, and cause it to appear tan and ragged. Leave short grass clippings where they fall, reducing the lawn's need for water and fertilizer. Remove thick patches of clippings so that the clippings will not kill the grass underneath.

## The 9 Principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping are:

**Right Plant, Right Place** — Plants selected to suit a specific site will require minimal amounts of water, fertilizer and pesticides.

**Water Efficiently** — Irrigate only when your lawn and landscape need water. Efficient watering is the key to a healthy Florida yard and conservation of limited resources.

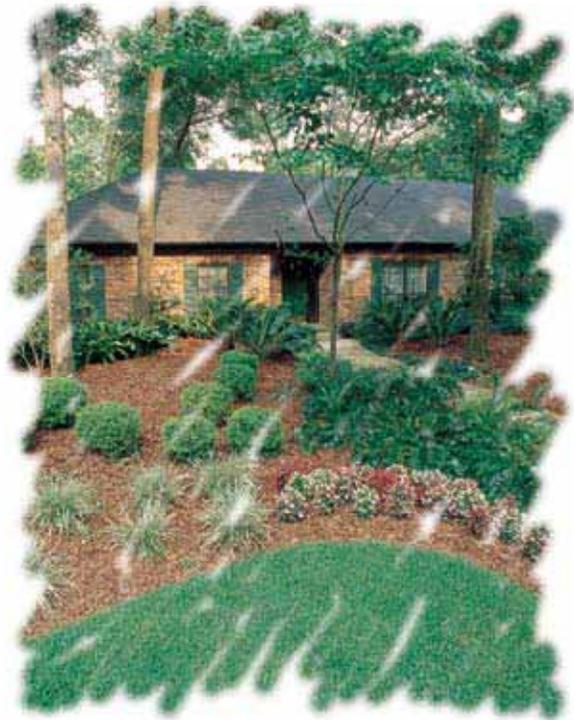
**Fertilize Appropriately** — Less is often best. Overuse of fertilizers can be hazardous to your yard and the environment.

**Mulch** — Maintaining a 3-inch layer of mulch will help retain soil moisture, prevent erosion and suppress weeds.

**Attract Wildlife** — Plants in your yard that provide food, water and shelter will attract Florida's diverse wildlife.

**Manage Yard Pests Responsibly** — Unwise use of pesticides can harm people, pets, beneficial organisms and the environment.

**Recycle** — Grass clippings and leaves provide nutrients to the soil and reduce waste disposal when reused on the landscape.



**Reduce Stormwater Runoff** — Water running off your landscape can carry pollutants, such as gasoline, debris, fertilizer, pesticides and even soil, that can adversely impact water quality. Reduction of this runoff will help prevent non-point source pollution.

**Protect the Waterfront** — Waterfront property, whether on a river, stream, pond, bay or beach, is very fragile and should be carefully protected to maintain freshwater and marine ecosystems.

These principles were established by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences for the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program.

- Do not leave sprinklers unattended. Use a kitchen timer to remind yourself to turn sprinklers off.
- Water slowly to reduce runoff and to allow deep penetration.
- Observe the watering schedule for your address.
- Dig out water-loving weeds and cultivate soil often.
- Use a rain barrel to collect rainwater. Rainwater is free and is better for your plants because it doesn't contain hard minerals.
- Do not hose down your driveway or sidewalk. Use a broom to clean leaves and other debris from these areas.



- Use a shutoff nozzle on your hose that can be adjusted down to a fine spray so that water flows only as needed. When finished, turn it off at the spigot instead of at the nozzle to avoid leaks. A garden hose without a shutoff nozzle can pour out 530 gallons of water in an hour.
- Avoid purchasing recreational water toys that require a constant stream of water.
- Consider using a commercial car wash that recycles water. If you wash your own car, park on the grass, use a bucket of soapy water and use a hose with a shutoff nozzle.
- Avoid the installation of ornamental water features (such as fountains) unless the water is recycled.
- If you have a swimming pool, consider a new water-saving pool filter.
- Cover your spa or pool to reduce evaporation.

For more information, call the Southwest Florida Water Management District at 1-800-423-1476, ext. 4757, or visit our web site at [WaterMatters.org](http://WaterMatters.org)

This information will be made available in accessible formats upon request. Please contact the Communications Department at (352) 796-7211 or 1-800-423-1476 (FL only), ext.4757; TDD only at 1-800-231-6103 (FL only).