

How do you know you are watering your lawn efficiently?

Have you listened to the water conversation lately? These days there are a lot of conversations taking place on the topic of irrigation and water conservation. The conversation is so serious that our local water suppliers are telling us which day to water based on odd or even number address. You may be wondering why proper irrigation is such a big deal. A person who has basic knowledge about irrigating a lawn and how the system works wastes less water and benefits by saving money. Their lawn has less weeds, less insect pests, and in most cases, a more healthy and beautiful lawn.

There are many factors that will help to determine an irrigation schedule. It is important to know the water requirement of each turf type; for example bahiagrass will flourish with less water than St. Augustinegrass, therefore requires less irrigation. Also, grass requires different amounts of water at different seasons of the year. For example, turf needs less water during fall and winter when the grass is not as actively growing compared to spring and summer when growth is optimum. The time of the day you irrigate is also important; the best time to irrigate your lawn is early morning before 10 am. Late evening irrigation is not encouraged due to the fact that leaving water on the lawn overnight will encourage disease. Watering after 10 am when the temperature is high will result in losing water to evaporation. Your soil type will also determine how frequent you irrigate; sandy soil has a lower water holding capacity compared to soil with a high organic content or clay. Therefore sandy soil requires more frequent irrigation.

Please note that irrigating your lawn should not be a hobby, it should only be done when needed. Only irrigate your lawn twice per week applying between 1/2 - 3/4 inch of water per event. If there is recent rainfall then your irrigation schedule should be adjusted. In Florida, the law states that all in-ground sprinkler systems must have a functional water shut off device. An example of such device is an irrigation sensor which shuts off the system during adequate rainfall. The sensor can be checked for proper function by starting the irrigation system and pouring water over the sensor. If sensor is in good working order, the system will shut off, if it does not shut off then the sensor should be replaced as soon as possible. It is also important to inspect irrigation systems on a weekly basis for any leaks, efficiency, and non-uniform irrigation pattern. Efficiency and non-uniformity can be checked by placing tuna can or cat food cans in different irrigation zones, unequal amounts of water in each can suggests that there is an efficiency problem.

Overwatering is a big problem in landscape; it leads to runoff and leaching of nutrients into ground water which subsequently results in non-point source pollution. Always keep in mind that overwatering increases plant disease, weed infestation, insect pests, requires more frequent mowing, increasing the cost in your landscape maintenance and your water bill. For more information on commercial landscaping and other related horticulture topics, contact Grantly Ricketts with UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County at 321-697-3000 or email gricketts@ufl.edu.