Do you want to save money on your water bills? Go micro! Micro-irrigation conserves water by applying it slowly at the soil’s surface. Types of micro-irrigation applicators may include micro-sprayers, bubblers, or drip hoses. When installed properly, micro-irrigation applicators distribute water more efficiently than typical irrigation heads because they apply water more precisely where necessary.

Micro-irrigation is exempt from most water restrictions, so even if you are not allowed to water with a typical high-volume irrigation system, you will probably be allowed to water with a micro-irrigation system. However, you will not need to water more often than you would with an overhead system. In fact, most trees, shrubs do not need irrigation as often as turf grass. Therefore, it makes sense to irrigate plant beds separately from lawn areas. Lawns are watered with typical overhead irrigation systems, but micro-irrigation is the perfect way to water plant beds.

One way to utilize micro-irrigation is to retrofit an entire irrigation zone in a landscape bed by replacing current irrigation heads with micro-irrigation converter heads (available at garden centers). This will allow you to run micro-irrigation tubing to several different areas from each head. Another way to install micro-irrigation by attaching a micro-irrigation system to a spigot near the plant beds that need irrigation.

Since plants or mulch often hide micro-irrigation systems, you may not be able to see when the system is running. If your micro-irrigation is not part of an automated irrigation system, you can avoid overwatering by using a timer (inexpensive and readily available at garden centers) attached to a spigot.

Here in Florida, about 50% of the household water we use is for irrigation. About 50% of the water we apply to our landscapes with typical irrigation methods is lost due to evaporation and poor application. Populations are increasing rapidly here, but the water supply is not increasing. Populations will continue to increase, and water demand will continue to increase, so what does this mean for our future water use? Do we find more water, or do we start using the water we have more efficiently? Many cities, counties, and water authorities are looking at alternative water supplies, but water conservation measures are becoming a must. Such measures include water use restrictions, allotted water budgets for new developments, and more efficient landscaping and irrigation requirements in new development. Regardless of your water source, irrigation is prohibited countywide between the hours of 10:00am-4:00pm, because of the inefficiency of watering when the sun and wind are up.

Restrictions on the use of both potable water and reclaimed water for irrigation are often employed, because any source of water is still a valuable resource worth conserving. Years ago, reclaimed water was once disposed of in excessive quantities on golf courses as a by-product of wastewater treatment. Now, reclaimed water is in high demand for residential irrigation, and sources are being frequently drained dry.

Osceola County homeowner Donn Barclay recently converted portions of his existing system to micro-irrigation, and added micro-irrigation to new planting areas. He uses micro-irrigation for his tree and shrub beds, perennial plantings, and the vegetable garden. “I love it”, he says, “It’s cheap, easy to install, and focused (in water application). It’s the most logical way to irrigate”. Barclay has been able to increase irrigation efficiency throughout his yard, and says the main
reason he chose to go with micro-irrigation was that he’s very concerned about saving water. “I’d like my grandchildren to have water. We have a finite amount and we are each responsible for conserving what we can, and motivating other people to conserve”.

For a detailed guide on using micro-irrigation in the landscape, see www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/publications. Call the UF/IFAS Extension at 321-697-3000 for more information on irrigating efficiently.

Learn more about saving water, time, and money in your landscape at these free homeowner classes:

**Low Maintenance Landscapes**
Poinciana Library  
August 2, 2007, 10:00am-noon  
And repeated on  
August 4, 2007, 9:00am-noon  
Register at www.tohowater.com or 407-518-2578

**Homeowner Pruning Workshop**
Extension Services, Osceola Heritage Park  
August 23, 2007 6:30 – 8:30 pm  
Register at 321-697-3015.

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