

Water Conservation Tips for Home Lawn and Garden

For many homeowners, watering the landscape is a way of life and not a necessity. Central Florida has been experiencing day time temperatures in the high 80s. High temperature, high humidity and low rainfall result in drought stressed landscape. The first question that one should ask is; how do I know when to water my landscape? The simple answer is, wait until the plant starts showing a dull appearance. Many times homeowners water their lawn because their neighbor waters their lawn. Homeowners often irrigate their lawns and gardens without being mindful of the plants water need and the increase in water bill. The following tips will help you to reduce water use in your landscape:

- **Limit Turf Area** if your Homeowners Association (HOA) permits- Irrigating the lawn always consume the greatest volume of water in the landscape. Reduce the size of the lawn by installing drought tolerant plants
- **Put Plants in the Right Place**- Only install plants that are assigned to our USDA zone 9b. Plants that are planted out of their assigned zone require additional resources. In addition, plants have different moisture and sunlight requirements; place sun-loving plants in full sun and shade-loving plants in shade. For example, zoysia grass planted in full sun requires additional water and will appear stressed while St Augustine will thrive in full sun.
- **Irrigate Efficiently**- Turf should be irrigated once per week and not on a daily basis. Deep watering wets the entire root zone and is more efficient. Each week adjust your water use based on temperature and rainfall pattern. Frequent watering encourages plants to have shallow roots which subsequently lead to drought intolerant plants. To further reduce water loss to evaporation, irrigate plants in the cooler hours of the morning before 10 am. Drip irrigation system is more efficient for vegetables and ornamental plants that are planted closely and organized while sprinklers are ideal for turf.
- **Mulch**- Placing a layer of 2-3 inches of mulch is a very efficient way of conserving moisture around the plants. Mulching maintains a cool soil temperature and protects the roots from the heat of the summer sun. Mulch can be a safe harbor for insects and cause the base of the trunk to decay, so it is a good practice to keep mulch about 12 inches from the trunks of the trees.
- **Appropriate Maintenance**- We do not recommend heavy pruning during the summer; it will encourage new plant growth and an increase in demand for water. Overuse of fertilizer leads to increase growth and subsequently increase the need for water. Reduce mowing frequency when there is little or no rain. Mowing promotes new growth and therefore results in the increase need for water. Mow lawn at a taller level during drought, this will reduce the growth rate and water requirement.

For more information on water conservation and other related horticulture topics, contact Grantly Ricketts with UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County at 321-697-3014 or email gricketts@ufl.edu.