The Governor and his cabinet have declared April Water Conservation Month. Do your part to save water during these dry times.

Consider planting drought tolerant plants. Some plants can naturally tough out the tough times of little rainfall. Plan your landscape so most plants survive on natural rainfall and don’t require irrigation once they have become established.

There are native plants as well as "exotic" plants, also called non-native, which are drought tolerant. Some add seasonal color and some are long lived landscape plants. While many folks only think of cactus or succulents, the list is extensive.

Proper landscape design saves water by grouping plants according to their water needs. Instead of watering the entire yard to wet the wilting plants, only zones with thirsty plants get watered.

If you cannot modify your irrigation system or you don’t have one, consider planting thirsty plants in containers or in a concentrated area of the yard so you only need to water the plants with higher water needs. This saves time and money as well as water.

A thick layer of mulch helps conserve water. Mulch acts as an insulator and keeps roots cool and at the same time holds soil moisture preventing it from evaporating into the air. Natural mulch, such as leaves or yard debris or wood chips should be kept 2 - 3” thick over the soil around trees and shrubs. It should be pulled several inches from plant stems to avoid rots once the afternoon rains start in June.

Rain shut off devices are required if you have an irrigation system installed. Unfortunately, no one requires that they work. They are designed to keep your sprinklers from running while it is raining and depending on the type and settings, should delay irrigation cycles for a while after the rain until plants need watering again.

The best irrigation sensor is you! Once you learn what plant water requirements are, you can adjust the timer or hand water only as needed and therefore, save water.

Proper irrigation helps plants and lawns develop a deep root system and survive longer between watering or natural rainfall. An efficient watering program includes three basic steps: determining when to water, how much water to apply, and deciding how to water.

The most efficient way to water a lawn is to apply water when the grass begins to show signs of stress from lack of water. The grass needs water when you see bluish-gray areas in the lawn, footprints or tire tracks remain after driving across the lawn, leaf blades fold in half (like closing a book), the soil is dry.

Watering only when the lawn shows these signs of stress is the most economical way to water and produces healthy turf for your yard. Delay can cause permanent damage. Bahiagrass, when properly established and maintained, requires less irrigation than other grasses. Improper watering of bahiagrass leads to weed problems.

Contact the University of Florida’s Osceola County Extension Office at (321) 697-3000 or look on the web at http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu/ for more information on plants and water conservation. On the consumer horticulture page we have many links to water conservation information and school activities.

Congratulations to the hundreds of youth and their supportive adults who are helping to clean up and
green up our community today. Youth Day of Caring is showing that young people make a positive difference. If you missed your chance to get involved today, contact Susan Crutchfield at Community Vision about future projects, 407-933-0870 ext 22.

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