Barbara Arrant of the City of Kissimmee's Water Resources Department shares some information on water use for this week's column.

Water is an integral part of everyday life, however we all take it for granted. Water is used to grow our food, control fires, and sometimes to heat and cool our homes. Water is used for making our landscapes beautiful and enjoying our great Florida weather with recreational activities such as swimming.

The Department of Water Resources encourages everyone to conserve and protect this precious resource. Recent studies have determined that by the year 2020, Osceola County will be in the moderate range for a drop in the underground water supply if new alternate sources of water are not discovered.

As part of a plan to reduce water consumption in Osceola County the City of Kissimmee's Department of Water Resources will initiate a conservation rate structure for its customers and their use of outside water. As an incentive for conservation, rates are reduced for low water users and the per gallon charge increases for high water users. The projected effects of the new rate structure should result in a 23% reduction in outside water use or approximately 100 million gallons of water being saved each year.

April is Water Conservation Month in the state of Florida. This is still part of our dry season. Our wet season does not normally begin until June. As you play in the yard this spring, consider the information below on watering guidelines and a new rate structure for outside watering.

Although water is important in maintaining a healthy, quality lawn, according to the University of Florida the majority of homeowners over-irrigate or irrigate incorrectly. Too much water is damaging to turfgrass and will result in the following according to University of Florida findings:

- A less developed and shorter root system
- An overly succulent shoot system, susceptible to disease and insect infestation.
- Weaker cell walls in the shoot tissue, which reduce the strength of leaf tissue.
- Buildup of excessive thatch, particularly in St. Augustine grass.

University of Florida guidelines call for watering lawns and shrubs "as needed". During the summer if there is no rainfall 2-3 waterings per week is adequate. The need for water can be determined by observing the grass for signs of drought. The signs that you need to check for are:

- Leaf blades are folded in half lengthwise in an attempt to conserve water.
- The grass takes on a blue-gray tint rather than maintaining a green color.
- Footprints or tire tracks remain visible on the grass long after being made.

When these signs of drought are seen on a large portion of the lawn, it's time to irrigate.

City of Kissimmee ordinance mandates no watering from 10AM to 4PM each day, with a few exemptions. This makes good sense for the entire county. We are fortunate to have these minor watering restrictions that allow us to water everyday of the week. In some areas of the state residents are faced with more stringent guidelines, therefore, if we begin to conserve now we may avoid any additional watering restrictions in the future. The University of Florida recommendations state the best time for lawn irrigation is in the early morning hours. Watering during the day wastes water due to excessive evaporation. Watering in the late afternoon or late morning may be detrimental if it extends the time the
lawn is naturally wet from dew.

The following is a chart of the "Conservation Rate" structure for customers of The City of Kissimmee/Department of Water Resources living inside the corporate city limits of Kissimmee:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gallons</th>
<th>Rate per Thousand Gallons*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3,000 gallons</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,000 - 6,000 gallons</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,000 - 10,000 gallons</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11,000 - 15,000 gallons</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 15,000 gallons</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*plus $.75 per month availability charge.

The following is a chart of the "Conservation Rate" structure for customers of The City of Kissimmee/Department of Water Resources living outside the city limits of Kissimmee:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gallons</th>
<th>Rate per Thousand Gallons*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3,000 gallons</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,000 - 6,000 gallons</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,000 - 10,000 gallons</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11,000 - 15,000 gallons</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 15,000 gallons</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* plus $.94 per month availability charge

For more detailed information on Kissimmee customer rates and restrictions, contact Barbara Arrant at 407-518-2267.

Osceola County Master Gardeners are holding a Plant Fair on Saturday, March 30, from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. at the Kissimmee Valley Agricultural Center, 1901 E. Irlo Bronson Highway between Kissimmee and St. Cloud. Purchase plants, attend gardening talks and bring in plant problems for diagnosis. Proceeds are used for educational projects. The Plant Fair is being held in conjunction with the annual 4-H Orchid Sale. Buy a Phalaenopsis orchid and help fund scholarships for 4-H summer camp.

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