A woman with short dark hair, wearing glasses, a wide-brimmed straw hat, a red and white checkered button-down shirt, blue jeans, and green rubber boots with yellow soles, stands with her arms crossed on a dark path. She is smiling at the camera. The background is a lush garden with various plants, including ferns and a tree with a thick trunk.

A Guide to Micro-Irrigation for West-Central Florida Landscapes

***How to save water through proper planning,
operation and maintenance.***



Acknowledgements

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Preface



In the Tampa Bay region, it is estimated that at least 70 percent of existing single-family homes and the majority of new homes have inground irrigation systems. As the population of west-central Florida grows and the building of new homes continues, the installation and use of automatic inground irrigation is expected to increase. Expanding the use of micro-irrigation in existing and newly installed irrigation systems is considered a key factor in increasing irrigation efficiency.

In 2001 the Florida Legislature declared Florida-friendly landscape installation and maintenance practices to be an essential element in conserving the state's water resources. The law was then revised to prevent any deed restriction or covenant entered after October 1, 2001, from prohibiting the installation of Florida-friendly, water-efficient landscapes. Local governments were also instructed to consider the adoption of water-efficient landscaping ordinances that include techniques such as micro-irrigation. Many local governments in west-central Florida have elected to develop and implement water-efficient irrigation and landscape ordinances.

This guide was developed to educate and inform the public about the design, installation, use and maintenance of efficient micro-irrigation systems in west-central Florida. For more information please contact a licensed irrigation contractor with micro-irrigation experience, the Florida Irrigation Society, your local county Extension office or your water utility (*see page 59 for contact information*).

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1

Introduction

Micro-irrigation, commonly referred to as “drip” or “low-volume” irrigation, offers a way to maintain or improve **landscape** quality while saving water. Originally developed in the United Kingdom after World War II, micro-irrigation is used extensively by farmers in Israel and the United States to grow agricultural and ornamental crops and is increasingly being used in traditional landscape applications. In many regions worldwide where water is scarce, it provides an opportunity for crop production.

When designed and used correctly, micro-irrigation can improve the efficiency of landscape **irrigation** through the precise application of water. Micro-irrigation **emitters** have a maximum **flow rate** of 30 gallons per hour (gph), or 0.5 gallons per minute (gpm). In contrast, traditional spray and rotor sprinklers can apply water at a rate of over 3 gpm. Used for landscape irrigation and potted plants, micro-irrigation is generally not recommended, and in some places prohibited, for use on Florida lawns.



1.1 Benefits of Micro-Irrigation

With proper design, operation and maintenance, micro-irrigation systems can have many benefits, including:

- Decreased water loss from evaporation, wind and **runoff**
- Minimized pest problems, such as weeds and diseases, by applying water to the root area of the plant
- Increased water application efficiency when **retrofitting** inground sprinkler systems
- Easy connection to hoses or outdoor spigots
- Flexibility in meeting variable water needs of new, maturing and established plants
- Minimized **erosion** when watering plants on steep slopes
- Compliance with local water conservation codes and ordinances

1.2 Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program

Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN) is available to Florida residents as part of the **Florida-Friendly Landscaping™** program through the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension Program and the Department of Environmental Protection, in cooperation with Florida's water management districts and with the support of industry and local governments. FYN educates residents about Florida-Friendly Landscaping, design and maintenance practices and promotes and conserves Florida's natural resources. Florida-friendly landscapes incorporate the principle of efficient irrigation in an effort to reduce stormwater runoff and erosion while conserving water. Because water is directed at the roots of the plants, where it is needed most, micro-irrigation is an important component of a Florida-friendly landscape.



The Florida-Friendly Landscape Ethic

Through the FYN program, concerned stakeholders learn about the following Florida-Friendly Landscaping principles:

1 **Right Plant, Right Place**

Plants selected to suit a specific site will require minimal amounts of water, fertilizers and pesticides.



2 **Water Efficiently**

Irrigate only when your lawn and landscape need water. Efficient watering is the key to a healthy Florida yard and conservation of limited resources.



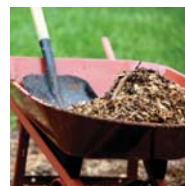
3 **Fertilize Appropriately**

Less is often best. Overuse of fertilizers can be hazardous to your landscape and the environment.



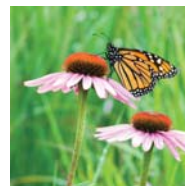
4 **Mulch**

Maintaining a 2"–3" layer of mulch will help retain soil moisture, prevent erosion and suppress weeds.



5 **Attract Wildlife**

Plants in your landscape that provide food, water and shelter will attract Florida's diverse wildlife.



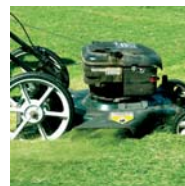
6 **Manage Yard Pests Responsibly**

Unwise use of pesticides can harm people, pets, beneficial organisms and the environment.



7 **Recycle**

Grass clippings, leaves and yard trimmings recycled on-site provide nutrients to the soil and reduce waste disposal when reused on the landscape.



8 **Reduce Stormwater Runoff**

Water running off your landscape can carry pollutants such as soil, debris, fertilizer, gasoline and pesticides that can adversely impact water quality. Reduction of this runoff will help prevent pollution.



Even small changes in landscape practices will collectively make a dramatic difference in water quality and quantity that will benefit all. This difference will come in the form of a revitalization of our water bodies and the preservation of our precious drinking water supplies for generations to come — while at the same time saving FYN participants time, energy and money!

9 **Protect the Waterfront**

Waterfront property, whether on a river, stream, pond, bay or beach, is very fragile and should be carefully protected to maintain freshwater and marine ecosystems.



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

Be sure to look for boxes titled “Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!” throughout this guide. They will help you learn more about Florida-Friendly Landscaping practices that may save you time and money while helping the environment!





2

Components of Micro-Irrigation Systems

Micro-irrigation systems can differ with each installation, but many of the components are common to all systems. This section provides examples of common components and their purposes.



Figure 2.1

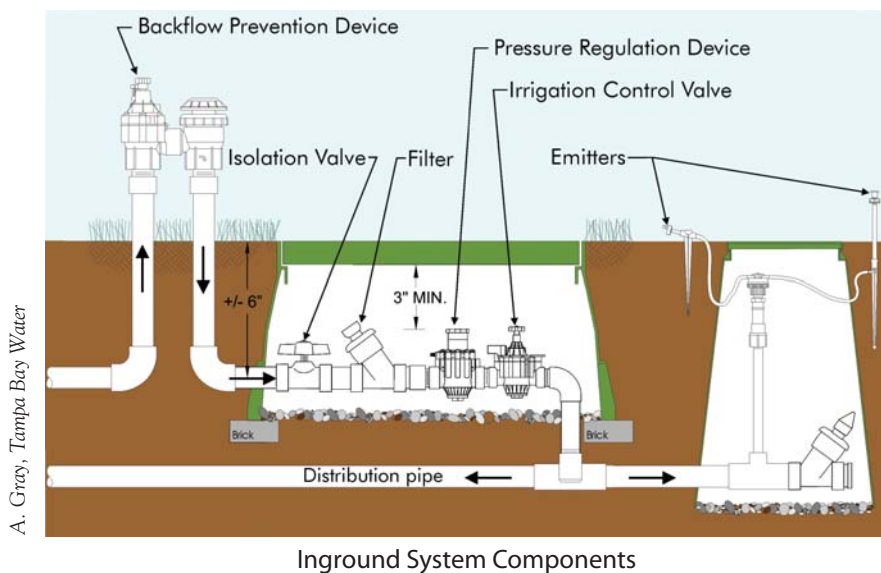
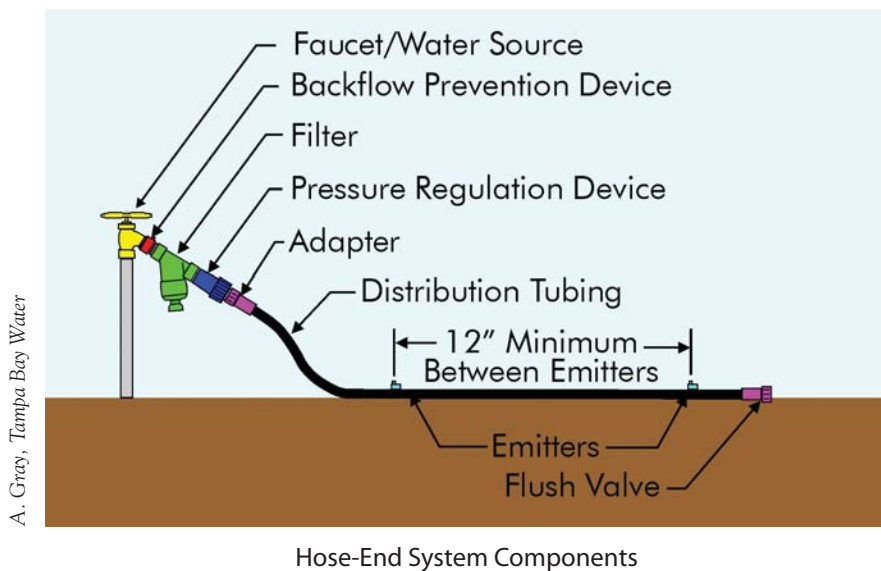


Figure 2.2



2.1 Common Components

Common components in this section are listed in order of installation.



Backflow Prevention

Backflow Prevention Devices

protect public health and safety by preventing water system contamination and pollution. These devices are installed after the point of connection to the water source and are required on all irrigation systems connected to a public drinking water system. Contact the local municipality to verify backflow prevention requirements for all water sources before installing or retrofitting an irrigation system. If a micro-irrigation system is connected to a hose, a backflow prevention device should be attached between the hose and the water source.



Isolation Valve

Isolation Valves provide a manual shutoff function that allows users to clean the filter and maintain the system. Ball valves are commonly used and are normally installed between the backflow prevention device and the filter. Water faucets perform this function on hose-end systems.



Filters

Filters remove particles from water to minimize clogging, which is one of the most common causes of

micro-irrigation emitter failure. A filter should be installed prior to any pressure-regulating device in an accessible location for ease of maintenance. Filters should be selected based on emitter flow rates. The higher the mesh filter number, the smaller the size of the particles captured by the filter.

- 200 mesh filter/75 microns — for 0.5 gph emitters
- 150 mesh filter/100 microns — for 1.0 gph and larger emitters
- 120 mesh filter/125 microns — for drip tubing with 0.6 and 0.9 gph emitters.



Pressure-Regulating Device

Pressure-Regulating Devices reduce incoming water pressure and help prevent rupturing of plastic tubing and connections. Installation of pressure-regulating devices is recommended since most traditional

irrigation systems operate at higher pressures than micro-irrigation. They are located after the filter and prior to the **distribution tubing**.

Irrigation Control Valves

open and close, allowing water to enter a specific area of an irrigation system. The type of irrigation control valve used depends on whether an irrigation controller is used. Some older systems are operated using manual valves that are opened and closed by the user.



Manual Valve



Automatic Valve

Common types of manual valves include gate and ball valves. Most new systems utilize automatic irrigation valves wired to an irrigation system controller. Each zone in an automatic irrigation system requires an automatic valve that opens and closes when signaled by the system's irrigation controller.

Irrigation Controllers (also known as a time clock or timer) manage the duration and frequency of watering cycles. When properly set, an irrigation controller can make system operation easier and help prevent overwatering.

Types of Irrigation Controllers

Faucet or spigot-mounted controllers are used on hose-end watering systems to control the duration and frequency of the zone operation.



Spigot-Mounted Controller

Single-valve controllers (battery-operated) are used where electrical service is not available.



Single-Valve Controller

Multiple-valve controllers signal irrigation valves to open and close in sequence to irrigate specific areas of the landscape. A variety of features are available offering flexibility in scheduling and operation.



Multiple-Valve Controller

Rain sensor devices override automatic irrigation controllers when adequate rainfall has occurred. These devices are mounted in an open area outdoors and wired to the common wire of the irrigation system. The irrigation controller automatically resumes normal operation when the water evaporates from the device. Under Florida law (Section 373.62, Florida Statutes) all irrigation systems are required to have a functioning automatic shutoff device.



Distribution Poly Tubing



Rain Sensor Device



Distribution PVC Pipe

Distribution pipe or tubing delivers water from the supply connection to the plant area. While polyvinyl chloride (PVC) piping can be utilized for this function, flexible polyethylene (poly) tubing, placed on or below the ground surface, is commonly used.

Flush valves allow the user to periodically flush the system of sediment, **algae** and mineral deposits that can accumulate over time.

There are two types of flush valves — automatic or manual. Either can be installed at or near the end of the distribution system. As an alternative to installing a flush valve, the end of the distribution tubing or in-line drip tubing can be fitted with a hose-end clamp that crimps the tubing, stopping water flow.

This clamping device can then be removed to allow for system flushing.



Ball Valve



Automatic Flush Valve



Hose-End Clamp



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

Micro-irrigation is recommended for use in landscaped beds, not for lawns. Lawn areas should be watered separately from landscaped areas.

2.2 Emitter Types and Uses

Micro-irrigation emitters deliver water at rates between 0.5 and 30 gph. Emitter selection depends on plant arrangement/spacing and owner preference. The following is a description of common emitter types and typical uses:



In-Line Drip Tubing

Uses

- Large groupings of plants with similar water needs in a grid pattern
- Single rows and narrow planting beds, such as along fences or in planter boxes

Advantages

- Easy to install
- Preinstalled emitters are self-cleaning
- Pressure-compensating emitters are built into tubing, providing a uniform watering rate
- Few parts used
- Water is not sprayed into the air where it could be subject to wind drift and evaporation

Disadvantages

- Can be easily cut by gardening tools
- Difficult to determine if emitters are clogged or tubing is kinked



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

Some plants are susceptible to pests or diseases because of sensitivity to water on their leaves. In these cases drip emitters and/or in-line drip tubing would be more effective than micro-sprays.



Drip Emitters

Uses

- Potted plants or hanging baskets
- Patio plants
- Planter beds

Advantages

- Easily moved to new locations
- Can be installed with few parts
- Water is not sprayed into the air where it could be subject to wind drift and evaporation
- Pressure-compensating drip emitters provide a uniform flow rate

Disadvantages

- Difficult to determine if emitters are clogged or tubing is kinked
- Visibility can lead to vandalism



Micro-Sprays

Uses

- Large groupings of plants with similar water needs
- Misting of new bedding plants and vegetables

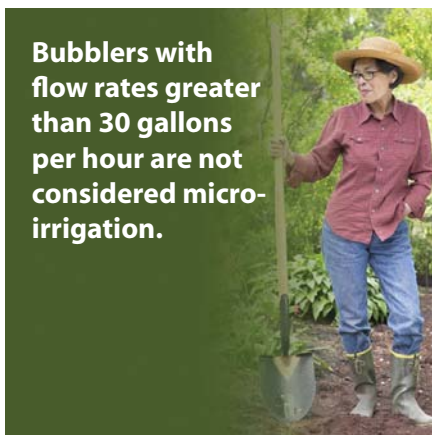
Advantages

- Emitters available in a large variety of spray patterns
- Easily moved to new locations
- Easy to tell if emitter is clogged
- Micro-sprays can be used for all soil types

Disadvantages

- Many parts can be easily damaged
- Visibility can lead to vandalism
- Water is sprayed into the air where it could be subject to wind drift and evaporation





Bubblers

Uses

- Establishment of large trees and plants
- Large planters

Advantages

- Easy to turn on and off as needed
- Used to nurse plants, as during the plant establishment period
- Higher flow rates provide more water in a short amount of time
- Water is not sprayed into the air where it could be subject to wind drift and evaporation

Disadvantages

- High flow rate can lead to ponding around plants if not monitored and properly adjusted
- In some cases, does NOT meet the definition of micro-irrigation due to high flow rates, so it may NOT be exempt from most watering restrictions



3

From Planning to Installation — Things to Consider

This section is not intended to be used as the sole example of how to plan and install an irrigation system, but rather to provide readers with facts to consider when planning and installing micro-irrigation systems.



3.1 Evaluating the Landscape and Irrigation System

Most inground irrigation systems are divided into zones based on available water flow and type of vegetation being irrigated. Each **irrigation zone** should be designed to meet the water requirements of the plants within that zone. Developing a landscape and irrigation system **schematic** will aid in the design.

It is essential that in-line drip tubing, micro-sprays, drip emitters and bubblers be operated on separate valves from traditional spray and rotary sprinklers. *For more detailed information about these components, see Section 2.1 (p. 10) “Common Components.”*

A micro-irrigation system design for a new landscape differs from the design for an existing landscape with an existing irrigation system. Therefore, the designer should answer the following when evaluating a site:

- Is this a new landscape?
- Is this an existing landscape?
- Is there an existing irrigation system?

Follow flow chart on the next page to determine how a site evaluation should be performed.

New Landscape

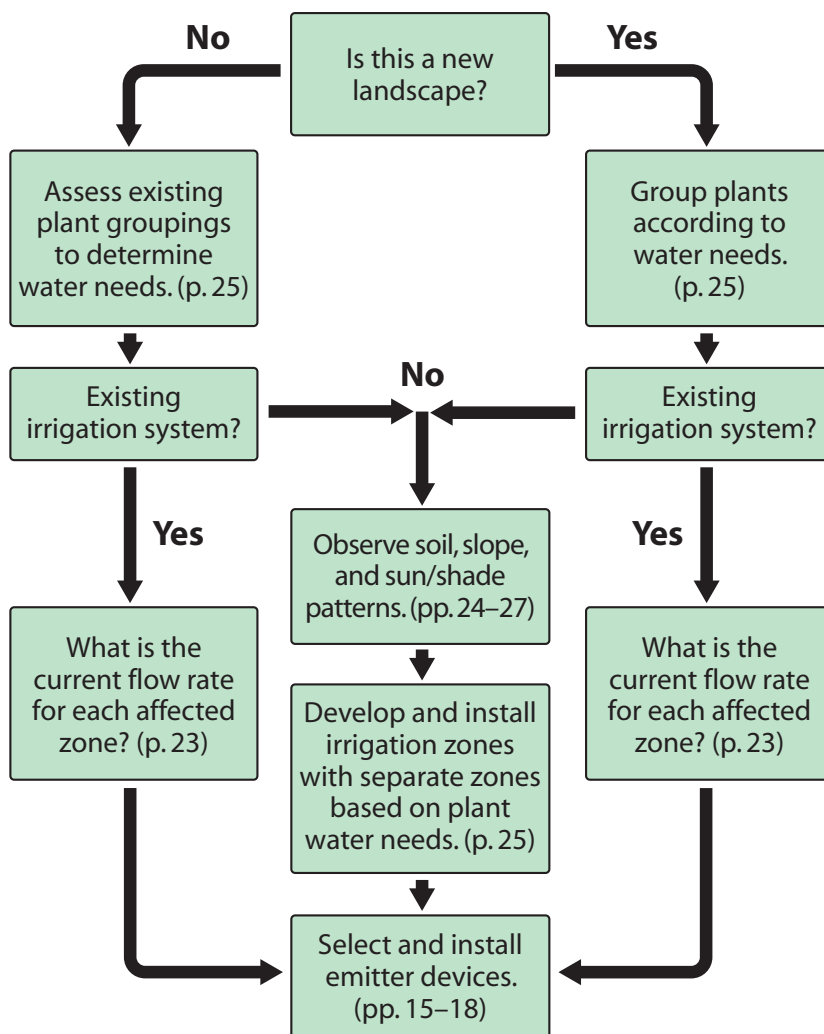
In a new landscape, plants should be grouped together by their water needs into **hydrozones**, according to low, medium or high water requirements. Select the emitter devices to irrigate according to similar water requirements.

Existing Landscape

An existing landscape may have an area containing plants with different watering needs. If this is the case, consider regrouping plants into hydrozones. Each hydrozone should have a valve independent of other hydrozones. Emitter type, quantity and irrigation frequency will be determined by the plant with the highest daily water requirement, the **indicator plant**.



Figure 3.1 Evaluating the Landscape and Irrigation System Flow Chart



Existing Irrigation System

If existing irrigation zones do not water landscape plants separately from lawn areas, major modifications or retrofitting systems may be required, such as installing valves to create new zones. If this type of work is necessary, contact a licensed irrigation contractor. The contractor will create new zones that will add valves, pressure regulators and filters.

When retrofitting an existing irrigation system, the design should take into account the total flow to the zone. The system should then be designed not to exceed that flow rating.

To the right is a common scenario, and possible solution, found when modifying traditional irrigation systems.

Example 1: **Retrofitting a spray head to micro-irrigation in a flower bed**

Question:

A landscape zone has three spray head sprinklers rated at 3.3 gallons per minute (gpm). The total flow rate to that zone is approximately 10 gpm, or 600 gallons per hour (gph). How many drip emitters are required to retrofit this zone?

Answer:

Since micro-irrigation devices are usually rated in gph, the options are:

1. Maximum of 600 1-gph emitters
2. 300 2-gph emitters
3. Maximum of 600 feet of in-line drip tubing rated at 1 gph/ft.



Example 2:
Assume in-line drip tubing
is used to solve the problem
in Example 1

Question:

What modifications are required before installing the drip tubing?

Answer:

1. Install micro-irrigation fittings to attach the system to existing sprinkler outlets
2. Add filters to each zone being retrofitted
3. Add in-line pressure regulator to reduce water pressure
4. Attach in-line drip or poly tubing to pressure regulator

3.2 Evaluating the Site Conditions and Plant Needs

Soil

The type of soil present is one of the most significant factors in any irrigation system design. Systems should be designed to accommodate soil types with different water-retention or “water-holding” capacities. *Figure 3.2 (p. 25) illustrates emitter considerations for different soil types.*

Sand soils

- The most common soil in west-central Florida
- Contain large-sized particles and have low water-holding capacities
- Frequent irrigation and/or closer emitter spacing may be required than with clay or organic soils to adequately maintain soil moisture



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

Utilize drought-tolerant plants! If plant placement is done correctly, little or no supplemental irrigation will be necessary once plants are established.

- The wetting pattern has very little lateral movement

Loam soils

- Contain medium-sized particles that hold the soil tighter together
- Better water-holding capacity than sandy soils

Clay soils

- Contain small- to fine-sized particles
- High water-holding capacity




Soil Type and Emitter Considerations		
Soil Type and Texture	Wetting Pattern	Drip Emitter Spacing
Sand/Coarse		12" x 12"
Loam/Medium		18" x 18"
Clay/Fine		24" x 24"

Figure 3.2 Soil Type and Emitter Considerations

Plant Grouping by Water Need

Group plants according to their water needs as follows:

- Oasis (high water requirements) plants may require regular watering
- Drought-tolerant (medium water requirements) plants may need supplemental irrigation during periods of extended **drought**
- Natural (low water requirements) plants will generally survive on rainfall alone once established

Potted Plants

Irrigation of potted plants and hanging baskets poses several challenges:

- Water has to be spread evenly throughout the container
- Plants in containers may require more frequent watering because of their restricted root systems
- Potting soil may dry out faster than soil in landscape beds
- Watering duration must be monitored to prevent excessive watering, root rot or inadequate watering



Plant Grouping by Sun and Shade Patterns

Plants with similar water needs may require less frequent irrigation when planted in shady areas versus those planted in sunny areas. However, make sure the plant is shade-tolerant before placing in a shady spot.

Plant Spacing Considerations

The size of a plant is an indication of the plant's root system. Roots generally extend one to three times beyond a shrub or tree canopy. Since the roots of most ornamental plants are quite shallow, they utilize water stored in the top 6 to 12 inches of soil.

Dense plantings usually consist of shrubs placed close together or plants that completely cover the ground, requiring emitters that supply a precise amount of water across the

entire area. Micro-sprays may be the best emitter type for this scenario.

As plants mature, **foliage** can crowd emitters and roots can spread out far beyond the plant canopy. Therefore, irrigation systems should be designed with the flexibility to meet the anticipated plant growth. *See picture below.*



Flexible Dripline Placement



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

Check with the **horticulture** department of your local county Extension office for information on the water requirements of plants. See page 59 for contact information.

Slopes and Runoff Potential

Controlled coverage and correct emitter placement are important on sloped areas since water can flow downhill and out of the root zone, carrying soil, nutrients and **mulch** with it. To avoid these problems:

- Install distribution tubing perpendicular to the slope and place emitters above plants. In this manner the wetting pattern remains within the root zone and erosion is minimized. See Figure 3.3.
- Tubing/emitters should be spaced wider at the bottom of the slope, where water tends to collect.

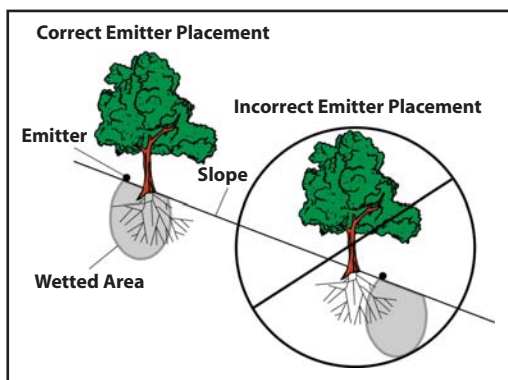


Figure 3.3 Slope Installation

Runoff potential depends on type of terrain (sloped vs. nonsloped), soil type and plant cover. **Erosion** can be decreased by planting ground covers that hold the soil or by terracing sloped areas.

Buildings and Damage Potential

Micro-sprays should be directed to spray away from buildings and exterior walls to avoid water spots on windows and walls. Install all components at least 12 inches from building foundations.



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

Planting drought-tolerant plants together in one irrigation zone will allow that group of plants to be watered only as needed.

3.3 Water

Determine which of the following water source(s) is being used or will be used:

- ***Drinking water***

Water that is suitable for consumption and meets or exceeds all applicable federal, state and local requirements concerning safety.

- ***Reclaimed water***

If the irrigation system uses reclaimed water, valve boxes and any exposed pipe must be colored purple for identification. A thorough on-site cross connection and backflow prevention inspection must be performed by the reclaimed water provider.

- ***Well water with a pressure tank***

This type of well system provides water at a pressure similar to the municipal water supply. Water from the pressure tank is provided “on demand” if the irrigation flow is less than the pump

discharge. If irrigation flow is equal to the pump discharge, the pump will operate according to its operational specifications (continuously). (NOTE: If creating new hydrozones, the flow rates to those zones should be compatible with the existing pump.)

- ***Well water without a pressure tank***

These types of systems are sensitive to changes in flow rates of any zone. Each zone should have the same flow rate to avoid pump cycling, which could result in pump damage.

- ***Surface water***

This water, supplied via pump by withdrawal from lakes, rivers, ponds and canals, varies in quality. Depending on the type of sprinklers and/or emitters used, filtration or water treatment may be necessary. This type of system is sensitive to change in flow rates.

Water Pressure is the force applied by water over a given area and is measured in pounds (force) per square inch (area), or psi. It is likely that pressure regulation will be necessary, since initial water pressure is typically higher than that required by micro-irrigation systems. Without pressure regulation, high water pressure can damage the irrigation system and break connections. Pressure-regulating devices must be sized for the system's flow rate. Operating water pressure for micro-irrigation is most efficient between 15–30 psi. Water pressure readings can be obtained by connecting a pressure gauge to the water source.

Water Quality can create problems in a micro-irrigation system. Filtration and, in some cases, water treatment may be necessary, depending on the water source. Water quality problems can be classified as physical, biological or chemical. *For more information see Section 5.3 (p. 49) “Water Sources and Emitter Clogging.”*

Filtration is required for micro-irrigation systems to prevent emitter clogging.

Backflow Prevention Devices

prevent contaminated water from entering the drinking water supply. All irrigation systems using municipally supplied water or fertilizer injection systems are required to have backflow prevention devices.



3.4 Installation Considerations

Once an irrigation system schematic is created and the necessary equipment is obtained, the system can be installed.



Before digging, call Sunshine at 1-800-432-4770 at least two business days in advance for free assistance in locating underground utility lines.

www.callsunshine.com

By following a few simple design and installation guidelines, many operational problems can be avoided.

Design and Installation Guidelines

- Do not run ½-inch poly tubing more than 250 feet
- Do not run ¼-inch spaghetti tubing more than 5 feet
- Use buried PVC pipe or poly tubing to deliver water closer to the irrigated area
- Place emitters so they are evenly spaced around plants; for example, emitter should be placed halfway between a tree's trunk and the canopy edge
- Install micro-sprays to provide head-to-head coverage
- For large trees, potted plants and hanging baskets, additional rows and/or emitters may be necessary to meet the plants' water needs
- Maintain plant health by moving emitters away from plants as they mature to encourage proper root development



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

CAUTION! When micro-irrigation equipment is not properly used or scheduled, overwatering can result! Light, frequent watering can also encourage disease and create shallow-root systems, which reduces drought resistance.

Types of Micro-Irrigation Installations

There are three basic types of micro-irrigation installations: hose-end connection, traditional irrigation system retrofit and new system installation. Necessary component checklists are identified below for each and should be used.

Hose-End Connection

- ☐ Backflow prevention device
- ☐ Filtration
- ☐ Pressure reducer
- ☐ If using ½-inch poly tubing, does maximum length meet design and installation guidelines?
- ☐ If using ¼-inch spaghetti tubing, does maximum length meet design and installation guidelines?
- ☐ Ability to flush out lines

Traditional Irrigation System Retrofit

- ☐ Filtration — need to know if it is built in or not
- ☐ Pressure reducer(s)
- ☐ If using ½-inch poly tubing, does maximum length meet design and installation guidelines?

- ☐ If using ¼-inch spaghetti tubing, does maximum length meet design and installation guidelines?

- ☐ Ability to flush out lines

New System Installation

- ☐ Valves — correct size for flow or pressure
- ☐ Filtration device(s)
- ☐ Pressure reducer(s)
- ☐ If using ½-inch poly tubing, does maximum length meet design and installation guidelines?
- ☐ If using ¼-inch spaghetti tubing, does maximum length meet design and installation guidelines?
- ☐ Emitter types installed meet intended need
- ☐ Ability to flush out lines







4

Operation

Overwatering is a common cause of many lawn and landscape problems. Proper scheduling, operation and periodic inspection of a micro-irrigation system is necessary to prevent excessive watering.



4.1 Irrigation Controller (Timer) Operation

Most automatic irrigation controllers have operating instructions attached to the interior panel of the controller cover. If the label or instruction manual is missing, contact the manufacturer's web site customer service department.

It is best to use a separate irrigation schedule, independent of spray and rotor zones, when irrigating with micro-irrigation. This allows micro-irrigation zones to run independently from the rest of the irrigation system. In an established landscape, adjust the controller seasonally to irrigate based on the plants' water requirements.

4.2 Landscape Irrigation Considerations

Plant Maturity

Irrigation schedules should be designed with the flexibility to meet water needs as plants mature. During the establishment period (the period between plant installation and the time when the root system is substantial enough to survive without supplemental irrigation) it is necessary to provide a regular watering schedule. When watering newly installed plants, irrigate frequently for short durations to promote root development. Over time gradually decrease watering frequency while increasing the duration to promote a deeper, more drought-tolerant root system. Once the plant has developed a substantial root system, watering can be reduced to an "as needed" basis. *For more detailed information see Table 4.1 (p. 41) "Watering Guidelines."*



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

Watering to below the root zone encourages plants to develop deeper, more extensive root systems that are able to draw moisture from the soil at times when there is no rain.



Weather Variations

Reduce irrigation frequency during periods of slow plant growth (typically November through February) and frequent rain events (typically June through September).

Soil Type

Plants grown in sandy soils may require more frequent watering and/or closer emitter spacing than those in loam or clay soils. *For more detailed information see Figure 3.2 (p. 25) “Soil Type and Emitter Considerations.”*

Sun and Shade Patterns

Due to lower **evapotranspiration** rates, plants in shady areas may require less frequent irrigation than those planted in sunny areas of the landscape. If installing a new irrigation system or zone, or making modifications, provide separate zones for plant beds in sunny and shady areas. Sometimes an existing system will irrigate sun and shade areas together, and only minor modifications will be needed. Such modifications include increasing the flow rate or number of emitters in the sun and/or decreasing the flow rate or turning off emitters in the shade.

Plant Type

Plants are grouped into one of three water-use categories or hydrozones: oasis, drought-tolerant or natural. When watering plants, irrigate according to specific hydrozone requirements. *For more detailed information about plant categories, refer to “Plant Grouping by Water Need” on p. 25.*

4.3 Scheduling Considerations

Generally, micro-irrigation has been exempt from the day-of-week restrictions. This is a benefit because plants may be watered as needed and not on a set schedule. However, watering restrictions may limit the time of day irrigation is allowed. Contact your local water utility or municipal government for current restriction details. Program the controller/timer to irrigate plants “as needed” with three variables in mind:

- Watering times
- Duration
- Frequency

Watering Times

If using micro-sprays, it is best to water during cooler, early morning hours to minimize wind drift or evaporation from the sun. Drippers that emit water below mulch are not affected by evaporation or wind, as long as mulch is of adequate depth (2 to 3 inches).

Duration

Controllars should be set to run systems to apply the required amount of water in each zone. Central Florida soils are typically sandy and hold about one inch of water in the top 12 inches of soil. Because most roots are in the top six to eight inches of the soil profile, $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch application of water will wet the soil in the plant root zone and encourage deep rooting. The goal is to replace soil moisture as it becomes depleted. Although plants may be grouped by similar water requirements, most hydrozones have unique

characteristics, and watering time for each zone should be determined separately.

Frequency

Landscapes generally should be irrigated as needed. A visual plant check (wilting leaves) combined with a soil check (feel for moisture below the soil surface) is an effective way to determine if a plant needs water. Many plants may require $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch of water per week during the growing season. An irrigation system operating schedule should be adjusted according to the type of micro-irrigation, hydrozone groupings and the conditions *listed on p. 35 "Landscape Irrigation Considerations."*



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

If manually operated irrigation system equipment is out of sight, a timer should be used to alert someone when to stop watering. An example is a simple kitchen timer.



Formula to determine how long to run irrigation zones with micro-spray emitters

- The following equations and examples are provided to aid in determining proper irrigation run times to prevent over- or underwatering.
- An **average application** rate equation for micro-spray zones or in-line tubing zones can be used to determine irrigation duration.

Step 1

Average Application Rate (AAR) for Micro-Sprays:

$$\text{AAR} = \frac{\text{Total Flow Rate (gph)} \times 1.6}{\text{Area}}$$

Where:

AAR = Average application rate in inches per hour (iph)

Total Flow Rate = Total flow of all emitters in one irrigation zone

Area = Square footage being watered

1.6 = Conversion factor (converts gallons per hour to iph)

Step 2

Irrigation Run Time (IRT) for Micro-Sprays:

$$\text{IRT} = \frac{\text{Application Amount} \times 60}{\text{AAR}}$$

Where:

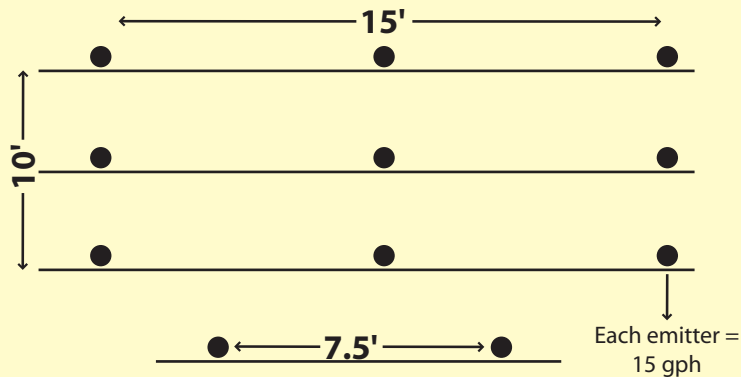
Application Amount = Amount of water per application (gallons)

AAR = Average application amount (iph)

60 = Conversion factor (converts iph to inches/minute)

* Figure 4.1 on p. 39 shows example scenarios for micro-spray calculations.

Figure 4.1 Example of Average Application Rate and Irrigation Run Time for Micro-Sprays:



Question 1:

If watering a 10' x 15' flower bed (a total area of 150 sq. ft.) with micro-sprays and the area has 11 micro-sprays that irrigate at 15 gph (11 x 15) = 165 gph, what is the average application rate? (AAR)

$$\text{AAR} = \frac{165 \times 1.6}{150} = 1.76$$

Answer 1:

The AAR would be 1.76 inches per hour (iph).

Question 2:

Based on the AAR, what is the irrigation run time (IRT) needed to apply .75 iph?

$$\text{IRT} = \frac{.75 \times 60 \text{ min.}}{1.76} = 25.6 \text{ minutes}$$

Answer 2:

If the plants are established, the general rule of applying $\frac{3}{4}$ (.75) to 1 inch of water per week is adequate. In the above example, a run time of 26 minutes will apply approximately .75 inches of water.

Formula to determine how long to run irrigation zones with in-line drip tubing

Average Application Rate (AAR) for In-Line Tubing:

$$\text{AAR} = \frac{231.1 \times \text{Dripper Flow (gph)}}{\text{Dripper Spacing} \times \text{Dripline Spacing}}$$

Where:

AAR = Average application rate in inches per hour (iph)

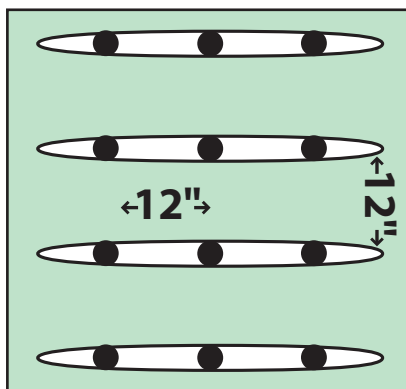
Dripper Flow = Gallons per hour flow of one dripper

Dripper Spacing = Spacing in inches of drippers inside tubing

Dripline Spacing = Inches between tubing laterals

231.1 = Conversion factor (converts gallon/hour to cubic inches/hour)

Figure 4.2 Example of Average Application Rate for In-Line Drip Tubing



If using emitters with a dripper flow rate of 0.9 gph:

$$\text{AAR} = \frac{231.1 \times 0.9}{12 \times 12}$$

$$\text{AAR} = \frac{207.99}{144}$$

AAR = 1.44 inches per hour

* Remember, as plants become mature and established, they should be watered longer but less frequently.

Table 4.1 Watering Guidelines for Trees and Shrubs During Establishment Periods

Type of Plant	Establishment Period	Watering Schedule ^A	Recommended Amount of Water ^B
Trees with less than 2" trunk diameter	3 to 6 months	1. Daily for 2 weeks 2. Every other day for 2 months 3. Then weekly until established	2 to 3 gallons per inch of trunk diameter
Trees with 2" to 4" trunk diameter	6 to 12 months	1. Daily for 1 month 2. Every other day for 3 months 3. Then weekly until established	2 to 3 gallons per inch of trunk diameter
Trees with over 4" trunk diameter	12 or more months	1. Daily for 6 weeks 2. Every other day for 2 months 3. Then weekly until established	2 to 3 gallons per inch of trunk diameter
Shrubs in 1-gallon containers	3 to 6 months	1. Every day for first few weeks after planting 2. Gradually decrease to every other day, to every third day until established	1 quart
Shrubs in 3-gallon containers	6 to 12 months	1. Every day for first few weeks after planting 2. Gradually decrease to every other day, to every third day until established	2 quarts
Shrubs in 7-gallon containers or larger	1 to 2 years	1. Every day for first few weeks after planting 2. Gradually decrease to every other day, to every third day until established	1 gallon

Notes: ^A Frequency may be reduced when plants are installed during the cooler months or during periods of frequent rain.

^B Do not water if the root ball is saturated.







5

Maintenance and Troubleshooting

Regular inspections and maintenance are essential for identifying and preventing costly micro-irrigation system problems. Micro-irrigation equipment is easy to repair since components are placed on or near the soil surface. Although the most common problem encountered is clogging, an irrigation system may also be damaged by garden tools, animals, overexposure to sunlight and interference from growing plants.



5.1 Maintenance Guidelines

To properly maintain the system:

- Periodically inspect plants for signs of over- or underwatering, such as wilting and/or changes in leaf color. If necessary, adjust the flow to each plant. *See examples of over- and underwatering on the next page.*
- Check soil wetting patterns around individual plants to ensure at least half the root zone area is covered. Whole root zone coverage is preferable.
- Inspect and clean filters and emitters on a regular basis. Even with the best filters, dirt and debris will accumulate in the irrigation system. Flush the system every two months to discharge debris.
- As plants grow, inspect emitters and move them away from the original planting area.
- Reset the irrigation controller seasonally to adjust to changes in plant water needs.
- When replacing parts, use only parts specified by the equipment manufacturer.
- When replacing mulch, be sure to move the system's tubing so that it rests just under the new layer of mulch. It is important that the micro-irrigation system be covered with no more than one layer of mulch. This step will help prevent blockage or pinching of the tubing that can be caused by excessive weight.

Specifics on maintenance are listed in Tables 5.1 (p. 47) and 5.2 (p. 48).



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

Get your finger wet! Some plants, such as impatiens and vegetables, will naturally wilt in the afternoon, only to perk back up in the evening as the sun goes down. Checking the soil moisture content around the plant's root system will indicate if watering is actually needed.



Overwatering



Underwatering

Signs of Overwatering:

- Leaves may turn yellow or light green
- Leaves may droop (wilt)
- Roots will be wet/mushy and dark brown to black in color
- Soil around roots feels moist to the touch
- Unusually high monthly water bill (only if water is volumetrically metered and billed)

Signs of Underwatering:

- Leaves turn pale or lighter green
- Leaves may droop (wilt)
- Leaves may turn brown from the edges and drop off stems
- Soil around roots feels dry to the touch

Table 5.1 Micro-Irrigation System Checklist: After Initial Installation

Frequency	Inspect	Action required
Weekly	All filters	Clean all filters.
	Plants for signs of over-/under-watering	Increase number and size of emitters one at a time to identify any potential pressure problem. If plants still show signs of underwatering, check for clogged emitters or a kink in the distribution and spaghetti tubing. Decrease irrigation time if plants show signs of overwatering. If problem still exists after two weeks, decrease number and size of emitters one at a time to minimize/eliminate any pressure problems.
	Emitters for proper operation	Look for and clean clogged and/or broken emitters. Run the system and listen for running water (indicating a break in the lines) if needed.
	Soil or mulch	Look for unusual holes and/or white sand, which may indicate broken lines or missing emitters. Flush lines and look for signs of debris in water, which may indicate breaks in the lines or failed filters.



Table 5.2 Micro-Irrigation System Checklist: Regular Maintenance Schedule

Frequency	Action required
Monthly	Inspect and clean filters. Inspect emitters for clogging, proper pressure and coverage; clean or replace emitters as required.
Every 2 months	Flush all lines by opening flush valve or unbending the kinked end of distribution line until water runs clear — this should take only a few seconds. Examine water for signs of debris or suspended matter. Reset irrigation controller with each change of season.
Twice per year	Ensure all flush valves and valve boxes are visible. Replace battery in automatic timer. Move emitters away from base of growing plants as needed. Clear valve boxes of dirt or debris.
Once per year	Test backflow prevention device.

5.2 Troubleshooting

The following information is provided to assist in identifying problems and possible solutions. Component operation manuals should be referenced for more detailed information. Most manufacturers have manuals available on the Internet. If you are unable to troubleshoot any problems identified in Table 5.3 (p. 50), contact a licensed irrigation contractor. A properly designed micro-irrigation system should include preventative measures to avoid emitter clogging. Specific recommendations vary by individual systems; however, each system should include flush valves and a method of filtering water.

5.3 Water Sources and Emitter Clogging

The cause of emitter clogging varies with water source. There are

physical, biological and chemical problems associated with different water sources.

- **Physical**

Sand, pebbles and suspended debris, most often found in surface, well or reclaimed water, can be too large to pass through tiny openings of emitters.

- **Biological**

Algal and bacterial growth, as well as small organisms associated with surface water, are often small enough to pass through filters in an irrigation system.

- **Chemical**

Florida's water may contain high levels of calcium, magnesium, iron or manganese, which may cause scaling and clogging. Scaling occurs when minerals precipitate, creating particles large enough to block the flow of water through emitters.



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

Look and listen! Casual observation can assist in preventing major problems in your landscape and irrigation system. Walk your yard frequently to become familiar with it during all seasons and to be able to easily and quickly identify anything that seems abnormal.

Table 5.3 General System Troubleshooting

Problem	Potential Cause	Solution
Plants show water-related stress	Clogged emitter	Clean /replace emitter.
	Clogged filter	Flush filter.
	Timer/controller not operating	Check power source and timer switch.
	Run times too long/short	Adjust run time.
	Run frequency is excessive/not adequate	Adjust run frequency.
	Valve not operating properly (See automatic valve section below)	Replace valve or consult irrigation contractor.
	Plants not grouped by hydrozone	Regroup plants according to water needs. Adjust/add micro-irrigation lines or emitters (see Section 3, p.31).
Automatic valve does not operate properly	Water not turned on	Turn water source on.
	Rain sensor interrupting valve operation	Test rain sensor for proper operation. Adjust rain sensor shutoff quantity to permit valve operation.
	Incorrect valve size	Replace with correct size valve for proper flow.
	Valve diaphragm not closing properly	Check diaphragm for sand and/or other debris; clean or replace diaphragm.
	Faulty solenoid or damaged wire	Check and repair wiring or replace solenoid.

Table 5.3 General System Troubleshooting (continued)

Problem	Potential Cause	Solution
No emitter flow or uneven spray pattern	Water is not turned on	Turn water source on.
	Emitter clogged or faulty	Flush , repair or replace emitter.
	Filter clogged	Clean or replace filter.
	Pressure too high or too low	Ensure pressure regulator is installed. Adjust flow control on valve.
	Supply line could be severed or kinked	Remove kink or repair line.
Emitter(s) loose or detached from tubing	Emitter is not installed properly	Check and reinstall or replace emitter.
	Pressure too high	Ensure pressure regulator is installed.
	Faulty or worn punch hole in tubing	Replace section of tubing, or plug hole with goof plug and place emitter elsewhere on tubing.
	Emitter retaining collar (located where it connects to the tubing) loose or missing	Check tip of hole puncher for defects. Adjust or repair retaining collar.

Table 5.3 General System Troubleshooting (continued)

Problem	Potential Cause	Solution
Drip tubing detached at the fittings	Fittings are improperly installed	Replace fittings or reinstall existing fittings.
	Size of fittings and tubing are incompatible	Check and replace with correct size.
	Pressure is too high or regulator is not installed	Install pressure regulator. Check pressure regulator for flow compatibility.
Excessive well pump cycling	Pump flow exceeds micro-irrigation system demand	Install pressure regulator. Check pressure regulator for flow compatibility. Increase micro-irrigation zone flow to match pump flow (add emitters or increase flow rate).
	Absence of pressure tank	Install pressure tank of appropriate size.
	Existing pressure tank needs maintenance	Check pressure tank.



6

Considerations for Hiring an Irrigation Contractor

If the assistance of an irrigation contractor is required, it is essential to determine if he/she is qualified to design, install and maintain an irrigation system. Speak with several contractors before making a decision. A professional contractor should provide a written bid, including each work effort in detail. A more detailed bid usually reflects contractor professionalism. It is important to accept the best bid, even if it is not the least expensive.

When determining which contractor to use, the information in this chapter could help a property owner ensure that the contractor is reputable and capable of providing a quality system.



6.1 Bids or Proposals

A bid or proposal is a guarantee of professional work and a statement specifying mutually agreed upon standards. Regardless of the estimated cost, insist on a written bid or proposal for your protection. After the bid or proposal is signed, any changes you and the contractor agree to make in work or materials to be used must be in writing. This written “change order” must also include any additions or reductions in the total job price. The following is a list of basic elements that should be included in most irrigation bids or proposals:

- Specific costs of materials to be installed.
- A specified start date and an estimated completion date.
- A statement regarding payment arrangements such as down payment, progress payment and balance due.
- The name, street address and telephone number of the contractor.
- A complete description of work to be performed and materials to be used (including quantities and brands of irrigation equipment).
- Guarantees of work and materials.
- A statement that the contractor will do any necessary cleanup and removal of debris daily and after job completion.
- A “Notice to Owner” explaining the state’s mechanic’s lien laws and ways to protect you and your property.
- A “Notice of Cancellation” stating you have three days following contract signature to cancel.
- A statement requiring the contractor to provide proper lien releases for suppliers.
- Validation of any required license and certificates of insurance, not just copies.
- Identification of party responsible for obtaining appropriate permits.





6.2 Before Work Begins

Licensing and Permitting

- Does the contractor have a current local business license to do this type of work? (Ask to see the license to check its validity.)
- Will the contractor provide and secure all necessary permits required by the appropriate municipality? What are the necessary permits?

Insurance

- Will the contractor provide a copy of the company's Certificate of Insurance for Liability and Workers' Compensation?

Experience, Training and Affiliations

- Is the contractor a current member of the Florida Irrigation Society, Irrigation Association and/or other reputable irrigation organization?
- How much experience does the contractor have in designing, installing and maintaining micro-irrigation systems?

- What type of training and certification has he/she received? Is micro-irrigation one of them? From which professional organization was the certification obtained?

Design and Installation Considerations

- Will the irrigation system include a backflow prevention device and filters?
- Will the contractor be installing a rain sensor device on the irrigation timer?
- Does the existing irrigation timer have multiple programming capabilities? If not, will the contractor install one?

Business Practices

- How long is the warranty for parts and labor?
- Will the contractor revisit the site free of charge to make necessary adjustments within the first month if excessively wet or dry areas appear?
- Upon completion of the installation, will the contractor submit a schematic of the

irrigation design bearing the contractor's license number and contact information?

- Will the contractor clean up the job site at the end of the work day and/or when the job is complete?
- What is the specific start date and estimated completion date?
- Will a subcontractor be performing the work? Will the contractor perform a prior walk-through of the job with that person/company?
- Will the contractor inspect the work performed by the subcontractor during and after the job?

6.3 After Work Is Completed and Before Payment

The following questions should be answered during the selection

process and completed after installation:

- Following job completion, will the contractor demonstrate to the homeowner how to operate the system and provide instructions in the operation of the irrigation system in both the automatic and manual modes?
- Will the contractor demonstrate that each component in the irrigation system is completely operational?
- Will the contractor provide system care instructions/maintenance schedules?
- Will the contractor provide the operation manual for the controller and other mechanical/electronic components?



Florida-Friendly Landscaping Tip!

With a multiple-programmable time clock, you will have the flexibility of varying the frequency and day of the week for watering various areas (zones) of your landscape. Remember to follow all local watering restrictions.



Other Resources

City of St. Petersburg Water Resources Department

(727) 893-7261

www.stpete.org/waterweb.htm

City of Tampa Water Department

(813) 274-8121

www.TampaGov.net/water

Florida Irrigation Society

1-800-441-5341

www.fisstate.org

Hillsborough County Water Resource Services

(813) 272-5977

www.hillsboroughcounty.org/water

Pasco County Utilities

(727) 847-8145

or (352) 521- 4274, ext. 8145

or (813) 996-7341

www.pascocountyfl.net

Pinellas County Utilities

(727) 464-3896

www.pinellascounty.org

Southwest Florida Water Management District

1-800-423-1476 (In Florida only)

www.WaterMatters.org

Sunshine *(call 48 hours before digging)*

1-800-432-4770

Tampa Bay Water

(727) 796-2355

www.tampabaywater.org

For classes on Florida-Friendly Landscaping, including micro-irrigation systems, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office.

Hillsborough County

(813) 744-5519

hillsborough_fyn.ifas.ufl.edu

Manatee County

(941) 722-4524

manatee.ifas.ufl.edu

Pasco County

(352) 521-4288 or (727) 847-8177

fynpasco.ifas.ufl.edu

Pinellas County

(727) 582-2100

pinellascounty.org

Sarasota County

(941) 861-9900

sarasota.extension.ufl.edu





Glossary

Algae – tiny, simple, rootless plants; algae can accumulate inside micro-irrigation components and cause clogging.

Application rate – equivalent rainfall or irrigation rate, expressed in inches of water depth per hour.

Backflow prevention device – safety device used to prevent contamination of the water supply due to water backflow from an irrigation system.

Bubbler – type of emitter used to provide large amounts of water to newly installed trees and large shrubs; usually NOT considered a micro-irrigation emitter due to flow rates in excess of 30 gph.

Distribution tubing – micro-irrigation system component used to convey water from its supply connection to the plant area; provides a connection point for emitters; distribution tubing is usually flexible polyethylene (poly) tubing, but polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe can be used.

Drip emitter – type of micro-irrigation device that slowly applies droplets of water immediately under the emitter.

Drought – conditions where soil moisture is insufficient to meet plant needs.

Emitter – micro-irrigation system component that delivers water directly to plant area; emitter components include in-line drip tubing, drip emitters, micro-sprays and bubblers.


Erosion – process of water or wind relocating soil, mulch and/or nutrients away from the plant area.

Evapotranspiration (ET) – combined process of water loss by surface evaporation and water transfer to the air by plant tissues.

Florida–Friendly Landscaping – design principles and maintenance practices that promote and conserve Florida’s natural resources.



Glossary



Flow rate – amount of water passing through an irrigation component or system in a unit of time; normally measured in gallons per minute or, for micro-irrigation, in gallons per hour.

Foliage – leaf material of plants.

Goof plug – manufactured repair plug for inserting into an unneeded outlet hole in the distribution tubing to result in a dependable seal.

Horticulture – science and art of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers or ornamental plants.

Hydrozone – plants grouped according to low, medium or high water requirements, served by one control zone of an irrigation system.

Indicator plant – plant with the highest daily water requirement in a zone or landscape, useful for signaling the declining moisture status of the group.

In-line drip tubing – type of micro-irrigation device utilizing poly tubing with preinstalled emitters at preset distances.

Irrigation – controlled, artificial application of water to cropland, lawn or landscape to supplement that supplied through nature.

Irrigation controller (timer) – a timing mechanism used to open and close valve(s) on a scheduled program.

Irrigation zone – portion of an irrigation system operated from one control valve.

Landscape – planted areas that normally include turf, ground covers, flowers, shrubs, trees and similar plant materials, as opposed to agricultural crops.

Micro-irrigation – frequent application of small quantities of water directly on or below the soil surface, usually as discrete drops, tiny streams or miniature sprays through emitters placed along distribution tubing. Micro-irrigation encompasses a number of methods including drip, bubbler and low-volume spray irrigation.

Glossary

Micro-spray – type of micro-irrigation device that applies water in preset spray patterns smaller than traditional spray heads.

Mulch – material spread onto the surface of soil to conserve moisture, regulate temperature and control weeds.

Pressure regulating devices – devices to ensure uniform water flow from each emitter operating from a common supply line regardless, within limits, of water pressure or elevation variations.

Pressure tank – water and air storage tank on well/pump systems using compressed air stored under water system pressure to reduce frequent pump start/stop cycles that can cause pump motor damage and rapid water pressure fluctuations.

Pump cycling – excessive on-and-off pump cycles due to irrigation zone flow rates lower than pump design (potentially damaging the pump).

Rain sensor device (also called rainfall shutoff device) – device designed to interrupt or cease automatic irrigation operation after a predetermined amount of rain has fallen and allows normal operation to automatically resume after the water evaporates.

Reclaimed water – domestic wastewater that has been permitted, treated and disinfected to a high degree so it can be safely used for irrigation and other purposes, such as industrial process water and natural system restoration; reclaimed water is not intended for use as drinking water.

Retrofit – process of altering an existing irrigation system with micro-irrigation equipment.

Runoff – rainfall or irrigation that is not absorbed by the soil but flows off the landscape into stormwater systems and surface water.

Schematic – diagram of an irrigation system plan.





References

1. Rainbird Sales, Inc., Landscape Drip Division 2000, *Low-Volume Landscape Irrigation Design Manual*, p. 10.
2. Dorota Z. Haman, Michael D. Dukes and Sydney G. Park-Brown, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, *Retrofitting a Traditional In-Ground Sprinkler Irrigation System for Microirrigation of Landscape Plants*, Document ABE324 (October 2002), p. 2.
3. City of Albuquerque, Public Works Department, *Low-Volume Irrigation Design and Installation Guide*, p. 10.
4. Rainbird Sales, Inc., *Low-Volume Irrigation Design & Installation Guide*, 1996, p. 2.
5. Florida Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, publications ENH 857 *Irrigating Landscape Plants During Establishment* (December 2002), p. 5, and ENH 860 *Fertilization and Irrigation Needs for Florida Lawns and Landscapes* (January 2002), p. 3.
6. Florida Irrigation Society, *Know Your Irrigation Contractor*.



