

Saving Water Outdoors

Use what you need,
need what you use

Water is one of our most precious resources. Because it flows so easily from our faucets, most of us don't appreciate its value. As a result, many of us become water wasters — especially when it comes to outdoor water use. Typically, outdoor water use accounts for up to 50 percent of water consumed by households. You can reduce your outdoor water consumption by taking a few simple steps. So tighten those taps, eliminate those leaks and use water wisely.

Seek the Leak

Did you know that even a small leak can waste 300 or more gallons of water per month? Check for the following leaks outdoors:

Water faucets, hoses and connectors

Check all faucets, hoses and connectors periodically for leaks and to make sure they are in good working order. Make sure faucets are closed when not in use. If you do find a leaky faucet, change the washer — after turning off the shutoff valve.

Automatic lawn and sprinkling systems

Soft, wet spots on your lawn around the inground sprinkler could indicate a leak that is being absorbed into the ground. Contact a licensed irrigation contractor certified in efficient irrigation practices if repairs are needed.

Swimming pool

Check the pool system's shutoff valve, which works automatically, to see if it is malfunctioning and causing a continuous cycle of water to be pumped in and then

drained out. If the water level stays higher than normal and it overflows when people are using it, call your plumber.

To check for a pool leak, place an empty bucket on a pool step. Fill the bucket with enough water so the level in the bucket is equal to the level in the pool. Without using the pool, check the water levels in a few days. If the pool's water level is lower than the bucket's water level, your pool may have a leak. Remember, most uncovered pools in Florida will lose about 1/8" to 1/4" of water a day to evaporation, depending on what type of water features, such as waterfalls or fountains, are present.

Service connecting line

If you find a soft, wet spot on your lawn or hear the sound of running water outside your house, you may have a leak in the service line to your house. Close the main shutoff valve. If the sound of running water continues, the outside service line could be leaking.

Contact your plumber or water utility if you detect wet spots.

Outdoor irrigation

Irrigation

How often should I water?

Know and follow your local watering restrictions, but don't water just because it's your day. Overwatering of landscapes is a serious problem. It uses up water supplies, makes plants more prone to disease and pests, and possibly contributes to water pollution. The length of time to irrigate will vary depending on your soil type.

Irrigate your lawn when it shows signs of stress from lack of water. Pay attention to signs of stressed grass, such as a bluish-gray color, lingering tire tracks or footprints and leaf blades that are folded in half lengthwise. Also, you can determine if your lawn needs water by measuring soil moisture.

Soil moisture should be checked to determine when enough water has been applied. Soil moisture sensors work with your automatic irrigation system to apply water only when needed. Reliable soil moisture sensor technology is available in irrigation supply stores.

When it's cooler outside, your lawn doesn't need as much water. Train your landscape to use less water by skipping a week of irrigation.



What time of day should I water?

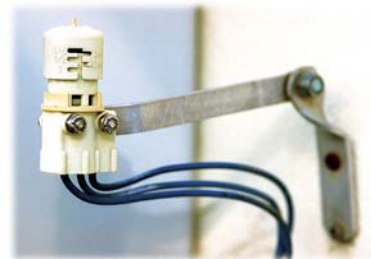
Evaporation loss can be 60 percent higher during the day, so water during the cool, early morning hours to minimize water loss by evaporation and to discourage disease. Avoid watering on windy days.

How long should I water?

For most Florida soils, an average of one-half to three-quarters of an inch of water per application is enough to replenish the grass. Saturate the root zone, then let the soil dry to encourage healthy, deep root growth.

To determine how long you should run your sprinkler, place several empty straight-sided cans (about the size of an average tuna can) at different distances within one zone. Run the sprinkler for 15 minutes and measure the amount of water collected in each can. Calculate an average water depth and determine how long it will take to apply one-half to three-quarters of an inch of water.

If you have an automatic irrigation system, be sure it has a working device such as a rain sensor or soil moisture sensor, which overrides the system when either enough rain has fallen or the soil is moist enough to skip an



Outdoor irrigation

irrigation cycle. These devices are required by Florida law on all automatic irrigation systems. Check regularly to make sure the device is working properly and that the corresponding switch in the control box is set at “on.”

Irrigation Methods

Micro-irrigation

Micro-irrigation in plant beds results in more efficient water application because it targets the root zone of the plants, irrigating 50 percent or less area. Micro-irrigation minimizes water lost to evaporation and slows weed growth.



Hose and sprinklers

If using a hose and sprinkler, place the sprinkler in the area that is driest. Allow the sprinkler to run the proper length of time to

apply one-half to three-quarters of an inch of water. When that area is complete, move the sprinkler to another dry area. Place the sprinkler so that its water spray will overlap the area previously watered. Adjust the hose or sprinkler until it waters just the grass or shrubs, not paved areas.

Inground irrigation

Inground irrigation systems can be automatic or manual, or a combination. The automatic system can provide an efficient method of irrigating lawns because controllers turn the system off after a predetermined amount of time, so a measured amount of water is applied. Learn how to operate your system. Check timing devices regularly to make sure they are operating properly. Check for broken or misdirected sprinklers monthly. Always replace broken heads with the same type and make sure sprays and rotors are not used in the same zone.



Lawn care

Fertilizing

Apply fertilizers sparingly and use those that contain slow-release, water-insoluble forms of nitrogen. Fertilizer applications depend on such factors as grass species, soil type and permeability, and your location in the state. To save water and to avoid thatch buildup, disease and excessive growth, follow these University of Florida-recommended practices:

- Fertilize in moderation. More is not necessarily better. Read and follow all fertilizer label instructions.
- In the central part of Florida, apply no more than 2 to 4 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year for Bahia grass; 2 to 5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year for St. Augustine grass; and 3 to 6 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year for Zoysia grass. For specifics in your area, contact your county Extension office.
- Fertilize only when grass is actively growing and always follow your local city or county ordinance. Allow a month between autumn application and the time of freeze, if possible, which lets new growth harden off and become less vulnerable to frost.
- Look for slow-release fertilizers or fertilizers that have a high percentage of slow-release nitrogen in them.
- Use a 1:1 ratio of nitrogen to potassium (first and last numbers on the bag). Test for phosphorus; apply only if lacking. Florida soil is naturally high in phosphorus, so ideal fertilizer is 15-0-15.

- Do not apply fertilizer when heavy rainfall is predicted in the next 48 hours. Leaching and runoff of nutrient-contaminated water may occur.



Mowing

Cut your grass at the highest recommended height for your turf species, or the highest setting on your lawn mower. Mow regularly, cutting no more than one-third of the grass length to encourage grass roots to grow deeper and grass blades to hold moisture.

Keep mower blades sharp. Dull blades tear grass, open it to disease, and cause it to appear tan and ragged. Leave short grass clippings where they fall, reducing the lawn's need for water and fertilizer. Remove thick patches of clippings so that the clippings will not kill the grass underneath.

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™

The Nine Principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Are:

Right Plant, Right Place — Plants selected to suit a specific site will require minimal amounts of water, fertilizer and pesticides.

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.

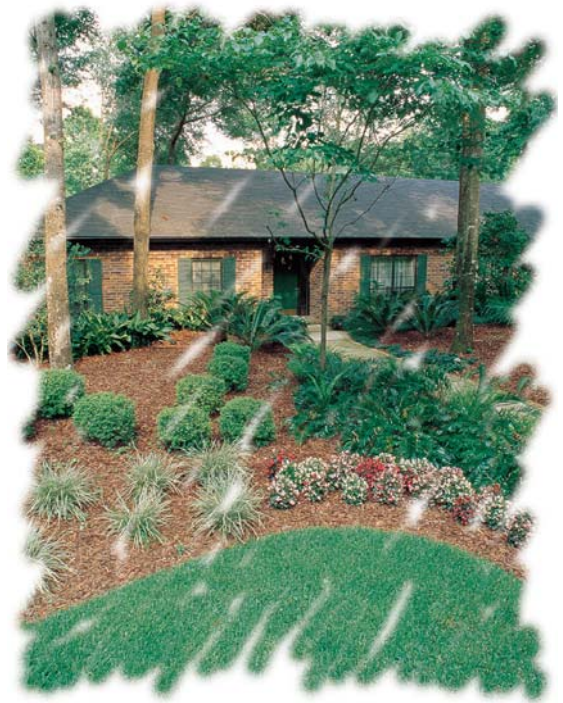
Fertilize Appropriately — Less is often best. Overuse of fertilizers can be hazardous to your landscape and the environment.

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

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

Manage Yard Pests Responsibly — Unwise use of pesticides can harm people, pets, beneficial organisms and the environment.

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



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.

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.

These principles were established by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences for the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program. For more information on Florida-Friendly Landscaping, visit WaterMatters.org or FloridaYards.org.

Southwest Florida
Water Management District

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Additional water-saving tips

- Do not leave sprinklers unattended. Use a kitchen timer to remind yourself to turn sprinklers off.
 - Water slowly to reduce runoff and to allow deep penetration.
 - Observe the watering schedule for your address.
 - Dig out water-loving weeds and cultivate soil often.
 - Use a rain barrel to collect rainwater. Rainwater is free and is better for your plants because it doesn't contain hard minerals.
 - Do not hose down your driveway or sidewalk. Use a broom to clean leaves and other debris from these areas.
- Use a shutoff nozzle on your hose that can be adjusted down to a fine spray so that water flows only as needed. When finished, turn it off at the spigot instead of at the nozzle to avoid leaks. A garden hose without a shutoff nozzle can pour out 540 gallons of water in an hour.
 - Avoid purchasing recreational water toys that require a constant stream of water.
 - Consider using a commercial car wash that recycles water. If you wash your own car, park on the grass, use a bucket of soapy water and use a hose with a shutoff nozzle.
 - Avoid the installation of ornamental water features (such as fountains) unless the water is recycled.
 - If you have a swimming pool, consider a new water-saving pool filter.
 - Cover your spa or pool to reduce evaporation.



For more information, call the Southwest Florida Water Management District at (352) 796-7211 or 1-800-423-1476 (FL only), ext. 4757, or visit our web site at WaterMatters.org.

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