



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

IFAS EXTENSION

Indian River County
1028 20th Place, Suite D, Vero Beach, Florida 32960
(772) 770-5030 Fax: (772) 770-5148 <http://indian.ifas.ufl.edu>

Irrigation in the Fall and Winter

By: Janet Bargar

Do you feel it? Fall is in the air. Well, Florida's version of it, but there is a noticeable change in the temperature and humidity. We aren't the only ones noticing the cooler temperatures. Our plants and turfgrass are also feeling the change in the weather. So, it is time to adjust irrigation schedules.

In the areas of Florida that get frost, turfgrass goes dormant and turns brown. This big change is not the case in Florida's frost free zones, but there are other changes that occur that make the turfgrass and plants need less water. One change is a reduction in the amount of sunlight the turfgrass and plants receive. Turfgrass and plants detect decreasing day lengths that accompany the fall season and respond by slowing their growth. That means plants and turfgrass don't need as much water. Irrigation should be reduced to one to two times every two weeks from November to February but apply one-half to two-thirds inch of water during each irrigation event. This amount will give the turfgrass and plants just what it needs.

More harm than good can happen if irrigation is not reduced in the cooler months. Plants and turfgrass can become stressed because they are unable to use the excess water. Fungal diseases can occur due to the wet foliage conditions, and root rot can occur. The plants and turfgrass are not the only things that can be negatively affected by over irrigation. Our natural water bodies feel the effects, too.

Once the ground becomes saturated with water from over irrigation, water flows off the surface or is washed out of the plant's root zone. This loss contributes to runoff, which is when water picks up and carries pollutants, such as loose soil, fertilizers, and pesticides, to a water body. The pollutants may then harm our water resources. Extra soil and unwanted sediment may clog fish gills, smother bottom dwelling organisms, and muddy the water, which decreases the amount of light reaching aquatic plants. Excess nutrients from fertilizers cause algal blooms, which also blocks light to aquatic organisms and decreases the amount of dissolved oxygen available to fish. Toxins, such as pesticides and other chemicals, found in the runoff can result in fish kills and poison aquatic plants.

As the temperature continues to get cooler, it is important to remember that the landscape practices used in the summer may not be suitable for the fall and winter. Too much water can be harmful to the landscape and cause problems in our natural water bodies. By simply reducing the number of irrigations in the fall and winter, we can keep the landscape and water resources healthy.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.

November 2004
Updated November 2006