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## **Saving Water Outdoors**

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Florida's dry season is underway. Without regular rainfall, the groundwater and surface water that are used for drinking, irrigation, and recreation aren't readily replenished. The demand on these water resources continues to increase with over half of our water used outdoors as Florida's population grows by approximately 900 people per day. Communities and government agencies are recognizing this resource strain by implementing water use restrictions that require residents to use water wisely in the landscape. Not only does this water conservation ease the demand on our resources, but it helps decrease water costs, electricity costs, and pollutants that are transported by irrigation water, which means saving money for you.

- Don't drown your grass. From November to February, irrigate lawns one to two times every ten to fourteen days. Irrigation should be done twice a week from March to October. Apply 1/2 to 3/4 inch water during each irrigation event. Grass in the cooler months doesn't need much water because the growth has slowed due to changes in the temperature and photoperiod.
- Don't set a regular irrigation schedule, but let your lawn tell you when it needs water. The following grass characteristics indicate that you need to irrigate: a blue-green tint, folded blades, footprints or tire tracks that remain in the landscape.
- Use mulch in plant beds. It helps retain moisture in the soil and control weeds that compete with ornamental plants for water.
- Be plant smart. Use native or drought-tolerant grasses, shrubs, and trees in your landscape. They do not require frequent irrigations and can survive during dry periods without watering.
- Group plants together that have similar water needs. Install a rain shut-off device to your automatic irrigation system if you don't have one. The device turns off or prevents the irrigation system from coming on when there has been adequate rainfall. If you have a rain shut-off device, make sure it is working properly.

- Stop spraying. Install water efficient irrigation devices such as micro and drip irrigation and soaker hoses in your plant beds. These devices apply water right to the plant's root zone, which reduces water loss from evaporation.
- Don't over fertilize the lawn. Fertilizer results in increasing plant growth, which increases the plant's water needs. Excess fertilizer can be washed away in stormwater runoff and pollute waterbodies. If you have a question about your lawn's fertilizer needs, contact your local County Extension Service about conducting a soil test.
- Regularly inspect your irrigation system to ensure it is operating properly. Check for leaks and clogged sprinkler heads. Readjust sprinklers so water sprays the grass and shrubs and not the paved areas.

To learn more about how you can conserve water in your landscape, please contact the Indian River County Extension Service for more information.