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## **Irrigation in the Winter**

By: Janet Bargar, Water Quality Agent

The cooler weather is starting to creep into Florida, and we aren't the only ones noticing the cooler temperatures. Our plants and turfgrass are also feeling the change in the weather and require less water to grow. So, it is time to adjust irrigation schedules.

One change is a reduction in the amount of sunlight the turfgrass and plants get. Turfgrass and plants detect decreasing day lengths that come with the change in seasons 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 ten to fourteen days from November to February but apply 1/2 to 3/4 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 when roots are constantly wet. The plants and turfgrass are not the only things that can be negatively affected by over irrigation. Local 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 causes 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 may 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 irrigation in the fall and winter, we can keep the landscape and water resources healthy.

By applying the following tips, you can help reduce water running off your lawn, conserve water, and keep your grass and plants happy.

- Irrigate 2 times per week (March to October); 1 - 2 times every 10-14 days (November to February).
- Apply 1/2 to 3/4 inch of water during each irrigation event.
- Inspect the irrigation system regularly to check for leaks in hoses, pipes, and fittings.
- Repair broken or clogged spray heads and emitters and adjust them to keep them from watering the pavement.

If you would like to learn more about how you can help reduce your impact on our watersheds, please contact your local County Extension Service for more information.