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Water Testing

By: Janet Bargar, Water Quality Agent

We usually take for granted that our water is fine until an advisory is issued. However, there are compounds in water that may cause problems in the plumbing and the landscape. One way to find out about any potential problems is to have your water tested.

The University of Florida/IFAS Extension Soil Testing Laboratory (ESTL) is a service offered to Florida citizens to test water samples at a nominal cost. Collecting and submitting samples is a simple process. Sampling instructions and shipping materials are available at your local county extension service. The ESTL analyzes water samples submitted by residents and then send you a report of the results. However, the tests conducted at the ESTL do not determine if the water is suitable for human consumption. This type of test may be available from your County Health Department.

The tests serve as a diagnostic tool for current and potential problems. Water that has a metallic taste may have an elevated amount of iron and manganese. These compounds can also stain clothes and plumbing fixtures. Test results can also indicate if there is saltwater intrusion occurring in your groundwater. Water that has a high acidic level may damage metallic plumbing and fixtures, but if it is high in alkalinity, the water can harm landscape plants and may reduce the effectiveness of pesticides. A combination of chemical and physical properties of water may reveal the likelihood of micro-irrigation systems becoming plugged.

Once the causes of current and potential problems have been uncovered, you are armed with enough information to tackle the situation. This may mean installing a water treatment device, adjusting your landscape maintenance, or drilling a new groundwater well. By preventing problems, a lot of time and money can be saved by not having to replace plumbing, plants, and irrigation systems in the future.

A little knowledge can go a long way when it comes to your water. I encourage you to take advantage of the ESTL at the University of Florida. Knowing what is present in your water can help you prevent and solve problems in the water and plumbing pipelines. For more information about water testing, please contact your local county extension service.

Information for this article was provided by the following reference: Mylavarapu, R., (2004) "Irrigation and household water test and interpretation." University of Florida/ IFAS Fact Sheet SL219.

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