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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 Summer

By: Janet Bargar, Water Quality Agent

Summer is here, which means heat and humidity. We aren't the only ones noticing the warmer temperatures and mugginess. Our plants and turfgrass are also feeling the change in the weather and require a different watering schedule than during the cooler months. Plants and turfgrass need more water due to the heat and longer days, but too much water can cause problems.

Water flows off the surface or is washed out of the plant's root zone once the ground becomes saturated. Plants and turfgrass can become stressed because they are unable to use the excess water. Fungal diseases can occur due to the foliage being constantly wet, and root rot can also occur.

In order to keep this from happening, proper irrigation is necessary. University of Florida research has shown that one-half to three-fourths of an inch of water per application is enough to replenish the grass in established lawns, and the rate of application generally recommended is one to two times a week in the summer. By reducing the number of watering applications, the roots are encouraged to grow deeper into the soil and that will make your grass more drought tolerant. When you have decided on an irrigation schedule, water early in the morning before sunrise. This time period will help to reduce the loss of water to evaporation and gives the grass blades time to dry so fungi do not take up residence.

But you don’t have to stick to a set irrigation schedule. You can adjust your irrigation schedule based on the amount of rainfall you receive. For example, if it rains half a inch twice in one week, there is no need to irrigate until the next week. A rain gauge is an easy and inexpensive tool for this practice. Watching the upcoming weather forecast can also assist you in adjusting your irrigation schedule. If rain is expected in the next two days, do not irrigate.

When over irrigation is practiced, our environment is negatively affected as well. The excess water picks up and carries pollutants, such as loose soil, fertilizers, and pesticides, to a water body. The pollutants 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 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.

The summer heat and humidity can fool us into over irrigating the plants and turfgrass, but this way causes more problems than it solves. By performing proper irrigation practices, we can keep the landscape and water resources healthy.

For additional information about proper irrigation during the summer, please contact your local University of Florida County Extension Service.

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