

April is Water Conservation Month

This annual awareness campaign underscores the need to conserve water during Florida's typically dry spring season by providing information aimed at improving landscape irrigation water efficiency. In April, May and June, Florida's temperatures begin to increase while the state's rainfall tends to decrease. As temperatures rise, so does landscape irrigation. Residents and businesses can conduct a Sprinkler Spruce Up and take steps to save water outdoors during this period and throughout the year.

- **Skip irrigation after rainfall.** If it rains at least ½ inch on or just before your watering day, skip your day by turning the irrigation controller to the OFF position. Then, turn it back to the ON position when you are ready to irrigate again. Never unplug the controller, as it may lose its schedule settings. A simple rain gauge is a good tool to calculate rainfall. Stop by the conservation office at the Lecanto Government building for a FREE rain gauge.
- **Conduct monthly inspections.** Inspect the irrigation system by turning on each zone for less than 10 minutes. Some systems have a test mode for this reason. Identify broken or misdirected heads, and correct before your next irrigation. Broken sprinkler heads can waste up to 25,000 gallons of water and more than \$90 over a six-month irrigation season!
- **Verify rain sensor is functioning.** We suggest testing sensor the day after an allowable watering day to avoid interrupting a scheduled irrigation. While irrigation is running, use a hose to spray water into the top of the rain sensor. The goal is for it to receive ¼" to ½" of water, which should trigger the system to turn off. If it does not turn the system off, the sensor setting may be greater than ½", which often turns the sensor off, or the sensor may need replacing. Required by Florida law, sensors typically have a 3 to 5 year life span.
- **Delay installing new plants.** If possible, postpone new sod, trees or plants until the summer rainy season. When planning new landscape plantings, use Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles such as placing the right plant in the right place. Two FREE classes held monthly. Register at www.citrusbocc.com/waterres/ffl/ffl.htm
- **Maintain a 2 to 3 inch layer of organic mulch.** Mulch holds soil moisture, suppresses weed growth and buffers soil temperature. Take advantage of FREE mulch available at the Citrus County Landfill.
- **Install a nozzle on hose.** Nozzles keep water from running constantly when hand watering or washing the car.
- **Mow grass on the highest setting.** That's usually 3 to 4 inches. Never remove more than one-third of the grass height at a time. This helps to increase plant root depth and make it more tolerant to dry conditions.
- **Know your watering days and times.** Citrus County is currently under Year-Round Conservation Measures, with an odd & even address schedule. Odd address: Wednesday/Saturday. Even address: Thursday/Sunday. Irrigate before 10AM or after 4PM. Two days per week allow some flexibility for landscape irrigation, but are not meant to recommend irrigating twice a week.
- **Water only when needed.** The goal is to saturate the root zone and then let the soil dry. During the warm growing season, a once-a-week watering of ½" to ¾" in the early morning is usually optimal. Watering too much and too frequently can result in an unhealthy lawn prone to shallow roots, weed growth, disease and fungus. Determining how long it takes to apply ½" to ¾" of irrigation depends on water pressure and head type among other factors. However, on average, rotor heads take about 30-45 minutes and spray heads approximately 15-20 minutes per zone.
- **Seasonally adjust irrigation schedule.** Landscape water needs decrease during cool months. A maximum of once every other week irrigation is a good rule in December, January and February. Take an even longer break if it rains! Not here to make adjustments? Consider installing a WaterSense labeled irrigation controller to automatically make adjustments for you. Some even provide remote access. For more information and rebate availability, visit www.epa.gov/watersense/irrigation-controllers.