



6 Ways to Cut Waste in Your Sprinkler System At Little or No Cost

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Half the residential water used is for watering the lawn and studies show about a third of that may be wasted. There are things you can do at little or no cost to stop irrigation water waste and reduce your utility bill especially if you use municipally supplied water for lawn irrigation. That's like extra income plus your lawn will be healthier, look better and environmental impact may be reduced.

1. Understand Your Water Use:

Indoor water use averages about 750 gallons per person a month. For example, a family of four uses about 3,000 gallons a month for basic domestic purposes.

Outdoor uses such as irrigation, pool filling, car washing etc. may be more than indoor water use. An average subdivision lot having 5,000 square feet of irrigated area uses between 2,000 and 3,000 gallons for each irrigation cycle. Multiply that by the number of irrigation cycles per month your system runs to get an idea of how much water goes onto the lawn. It may be a lot of water!

Look at your municipal utility bill. Focus on the charges for water and sewer; notice the water rates are tiered. When certain water use amounts are exceeded, the cost per 1,000 gallons goes up. Sewer charges are added to the amount of water used, indoors or out.

Cutting water waste in the sprinkler system will reduce the gallons of water (and sewer) used and may drop the cost per 1,000 gallons used into a lower cost tier. You save on the higher cost water first. Some utility bills include a small chart showing your water use history for past months making it easier to track your water-saving progress.

2. **Take Charge of the Irrigation Controller:** Replace the small back-up battery every two to three years. Set the controller for the current day, time and year. Directions are on a label inside the controller door. Next put the three key pieces of information below into the controller to make it as efficient as it can be. See *“Using the Irrigation Controller for a Better Lawn on Less Water”* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep235> and *Watering Your Florida Lawn* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH025>.

- a. **What day to water:** Set the controller to operate only on your allowed watering days. Then switch the controller to “Off”. When you begin to see dry spots in the lawn switch to “Automatic” to water on the next allowed day. After watering or rainfall go back to “Off”. This encourages a deeper, more drought tolerant root zone by watering thoroughly but only as needed. Established lawns may go two



weeks or longer without water in the winter but only 3 to 5 days in the summer. See *Let Your Lawn Tell You When to Water* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep054>.

- b. **How long to water:** Adjust the timer so each zone receives $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch of water. Here's how. Spread 6 or more empty tuna or pet food cans in each irrigation zone, one zone at a time. Time how long it takes for sprinklers to put out $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch of water, on average, in cans. Set timer for that many minutes in that zone. Repeat test for other zones.
 - c. **Set the start time:** Early morning is best. Add all the zone run times together from step 2 and subtract the total from 8 AM. Set that time in the controller and set any additional start times to zero.
3. **Seek the Leak:** Look for soft, very wet spots or water flowing up around sprinklers indicating a broken pipe or a leak. Expose and repair as necessary. See the publication *Basic Repairs and Maintenance for Home Landscape Irrigation Systems* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae451>.
 4. **Survey the Sprinklers:** Trim overgrown grass or shrubs that block sprinkler spray patterns. Adjust sprinklers to put water only onto your lawn without overspray onto streets, walks, buildings or neighboring yards. Sprinkler nozzles or a complete sprinkler may need to be changed. They are readily available at a reasonable cost from irrigation supply and home improvement stores. Choose carefully for the correct brand, spray pattern and distance. The spray from one sprinkler should touch its neighboring sprinkler for uniform coverage.
 5. **Mow High and Sharp:** Adjust the mower cutting height at 3.5 to 4 inches for Augustine and Bahia grass; 1.5 to 2.5 inches for Zoysia. Keep blades sharp to prevent ragged, brown grass tips. See *Mowing Your Florida Lawn* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh028>.
 6. **Mulch the Bare Places:** Keep 2 to 3 inches of mulch on beds of shrubs and flowers, around trees and other bare areas to retain soil moisture and suppress weeds. See *Mulches for the Landscape* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg251>.



Want help? The Manatee County Extension Service offers a free, no obligation landscape and irrigation evaluation to identify water-saving opportunities in your lawn. Annual savings are averaging about 20,000 gallons of water and \$200 per participant. Call or visit the website.

For more information call the Agriculture and Extension Service, 1303 17th Street W, Palmetto, FL 34221, (941) 722-4524 or go to the website at <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu> and click on "Water Conservation Program" on the bottom left side of page. If you are unable to access the publications referenced in this article on a computer, contact the writer to obtain a free printed copy.