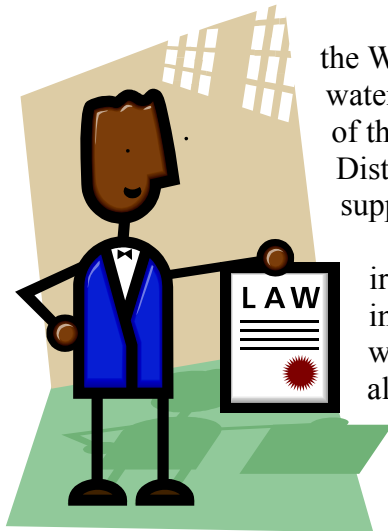

Living With the New Water Restrictions

Perhaps you've heard by now that new water use guidelines have been issued for January 16 to July 31, 2007 that affect the citizens of Manatee County. First I'll explain where these restrictions come from then offer some practical ways we can adjust to the new rules.



All fresh water in Florida is actually the property of the state with the Water Management District being solely responsible for managing the water through five Water Management Districts. Manatee County is one of the sixteen counties in The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). Their mission is to provide a sustainable water supply, while restoring and protecting the environment.

One of their more obvious tasks is the regulation of landscape irrigation. Two big factors that shape these regulations are the surge in population growth and the variability of the weather. It goes without saying there are a lot more of us here now, but we may not always notice the gradual change in rainfall patterns. The SWFWMD notices. Being mindful that we're at the beginning of our typical dry season of the year here is a brief summary of additional concerns SWFWMD has considered in changing the watering restrictions:

- Rainfall in 2006 was 11.6 inches below normal.
- Groundwater levels and river streamflows are low.
- Drought or abnormally dry conditions are already here.
- Irrigation water demand has increased.

So to help conserve our water supplies in response to the above, from January 16 through July 31, 2007 we are on a "one day a week" watering schedule and the allowed time of day to water has been reduced. See the summary of the new rules below.

Follow these new water restrictions*

Jan. 16 to July 31, 2007

(unless where you live has stricter rules)

These restrictions apply to the use of water from public and private utilities as well as the use of all wells and surface water sources (ponds, rivers, etc.).

- *If your address (house number) ends in ...
...0 or 1, water only on Monday
...2 or 3, water only on Tuesday
...4 or 5, water only on Wednesday
...6 or 7, water only on Thursday
...8 or 9*, water only on Friday
and locations without a discernible address
- *Water before 8 a.m. or after 6 p.m.*
- *Hand watering or micro-irrigation of non-lawn areas is allowed on any day.*

*For complete details contact The Southwest Florida Water Management District at their website, www.WaterMatters.org, or call 1-800-848-0499.

Adjusting to the new rules may not be as bad as you may think. Many people unknowingly over water their lawns anyway. Actually, for most situations, the new rules are similar to what we have been recommending all along.

Follow these basic steps to adjust your irrigation controller, or timer as some call it, for compliance and water efficiency. Controllers are generally user friendly and self explanatory. Most controllers have a “how to” label attached. If it’s missing, local dealers may be able to supply one or go to the manufacturer’s website and download one.

- First, if you haven’t replaced the small “memory” battery in the last two or three years, this will be a good time to do that. It’s usually behind a small panel in the lower front of the controller.
- Check to verify the current day and time are displayed.
- Set your controller to water on your one allowed day per week and no others. If you’ve been watering more often, this could be good news for your lawn and your utility bill. If a rain of ½ inch or more is received near the next watering day, leave the system off and skip an irrigation. Rain gauges are available at most gardening stores or you can pick up one at the Extension Service Office (address below). University research has demonstrated that generally, a well established lawn in our area will do fine during the cool season with water from rain or sprinklers once every two weeks,

especially if the grass has been conditioned to develop deep roots by watering thoroughly and infrequently as outlined here.

- Set the start time to begin watering in the early morning so that the last zone to be watered is finished by 8 a.m. Watering in the evening encourages disease development on grass that's wet all night. Verify there is only one start time programmed for each zone. Some controllers provide for two or more repeat cycles.

The last step, below, calibrating the system, is not a required part of the restrictions, but is highly recommended for adjusting your irrigation system to put on the proper amount of water and no more. Many lawns are over watered (and some under watered) for the lack of this key adjustment.

- Calibrate the system (or set the run time for each zone). (A zone is the portion of your lawn that is watered by a single control valve.) University research has demonstrated that it's best to apply $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of water at each irrigation. Any more than this is wasted. This wets most Florida soils about nine inches deep to encourage deeper grass rooting and increased drought tolerance. To determine how long to run each zone to put on $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of water do this simple calibration test. Place about six to ten empty tuna cans randomly in irrigation zone one, turn that zone on and time how long it takes to catch an average of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of water in cans. Set that number of minutes for the run time for zone one. Repeat the test for other zones. Each zone is different and should be tested but zones with spray type sprinklers typically take 20 to 30 minutes; rotor type sprinklers take from about 60 to 90 minutes. *Note: A Lawn Sprinkler Tune Up Kit makes this step easier. See our website for distribution details.*

Congratulations! You now have an irrigation controller that is in compliance and properly adjusted for optimum water use and a healthier lawn. There are more tips and tools available to reduce water use and improve the health of your lawn. See the website or call for a schedule of classes and workshops.

For more information call the Manatee County Extension Service Office, 1303 17th Street W, Palmetto, FL 34221, (941) 722-4524 or go to the website at <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/water.htm>.

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Irrigation Controller