



Nation-wide Focus on Saving Water and Money

Edited by Jack Tichenor, Manatee County Agriculture and Extension Service

Smart Irrigation Month is a public awareness campaign to promote efficient water use. Focused on July, traditionally the month of peak demand for outdoor water use nationally, the campaign highlights simple practices and innovative technologies to:

- Make maintaining green spaces easy and convenient.
- Minimize overwatering while keeping lawns, gardens and landscapes beautiful and healthy.
- Save money on utility bills.
- Help protect community water supplies for today and the future.



Property owners and managers typically overwater, unintentionally wasting money every time they take out the hose or turn on the sprinklers. The University of Florida/Manatee County Extension Service Water Conservation Program (Extension Service) promotes smart water-saving practices year-round and offers these suggestions for Smart Irrigation Month:

- Plant and maintain low water use landscapes that will thrive in our local climate and site conditions. Called *Hydrozoning*, plants can also be grouped into low, medium or high water needs and irrigated accordingly to save water and improve plant health.
- Use low volume micro-irrigation to precisely apply very small amounts of water to gardens, trees and shrubs in mulched beds, minimizing evaporation and waste.
- Incorporate non-irrigated hardscapes and mulched areas such as patios, service areas and pathways into the landscape.
- Periodically inspect irrigation system in operation for overspray onto streets, drives, buildings, etc., for leaks, dry areas and broken sprinklers, and for overgrown grass, shrubs and limbs that block spray patterns.

- Check irrigation controller for correct date, time and for compliance with the current watering restrictions.
- Make conventional irrigation controllers smarter by installing water-saving technology:
 - rain sensor shut off switch that prevents watering after an adequate rain,
 - soil moisture sensor control device that prevents irrigation when soil moisture is adequate,
 - real-time weather based irrigation control that automatically adjusts for weather and seasonal changes.
- Audit irrigation system to make sure water is being used effectively and make necessary adjustments. Contact the Extension Service to schedule this free, personalized irrigation system evaluation.
- Make use of Manatee County Utilities Dept. rebates for qualifying customers for making recommended water-saving improvements.
- Learn how to apply the above practices and more at free classes and from educational materials provided by the Extension Service.



For more information about how the Manatee County Agriculture and Extension Service can help Manatee homeowners, businesses and property managers, visit <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu>, call (941)722-4524 or visit the office at 1303 17th Street W., Palmetto, FL 34221.

Smart Irrigation Month is an initiative of The Irrigation Association, a non-profit industry organization dedicated to promoting efficient irrigation. Visit www.smartirrigationmonth.org to learn more. This article contains some material from The Irrigation Association and from IFAS/University of Florida.

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