

The June Turn Around

Start of rainy season reverses lawn-watering plans.
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The onset of summer in Florida brings the rainy season with frequent, heavy downpours. This is good news as lawns can dry out quickly in the summer heat. The bad news is when automatic sprinkler systems are not seasonally changed and they keep watering weekly as if it is still the dry season. Frequent rains and a busy irrigation system cause overwatering. An overwatered lawn brings moisture-loving weeds, fungus and root rot plus can cause pesticides and fertilizers to runoff into water bodies.

Fortunately, there are some effective, low-cost steps you can take to help prevent overwatering. Awareness and involvement are the keys to success.

- **Use a rain gauge** to keep track of recent rainfall amounts. If it rains ½-inch or more, an upcoming automatic irrigation cycle can be skipped by changing the irrigation controller from “automatic” to “off.” During the heat of summer your lawn may appear dry after a few days of no rain (wilted, a blue-grey color, footprints remain after several minutes). Be mindful of when your next allowed watering day is and set the controller back to “automatic” if no rain is expected. Empty the rain gauge after each rain. Gauges are inexpensive and can be bought where are available where garden supplies are sold.



Rain Gauge

- **Install a rain sensor irrigation shut-off switch** to prevent your automatic irrigation system from operating after a rain. Research has proven a rain sensor can save 34 percent of the irrigation water during the rainy season. It costs about \$25 or more to water a typical 5,000 square foot lawn one time so a few skipped irrigation cycles will pay for the sensor. Adjust the switch to stop irrigation after ½-inch of rain. The switch is especially handy when you are away or unable to use the rain gauge. Florida law has required rain sensors since 1991.



Rain Sensor Irrigation Shut-off Switch

- **Apply $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch of water each irrigation cycle** which will moisten dry soil to about 8 to 9 inches deep to encourage deeper rooting. Spread eight or more empty tuna or cat food cans in irrigation zone one and time how many minutes it takes to get an *average* of $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch water in the cans. Set the controller for that number of minutes for zone one. Repeat the process for all other zones. Irrigation zones with spray type sprinklers usually need to run for about 20 to 30 minutes; rotor type zones take about 45 minutes or more. Use the cans to get it right. It is best to water thoroughly but infrequently.

This fact sheet was written and distributed by the Manatee County Extension Service, 1303 17th Street, W., Palmetto, FL 34221. For details on rain gauges, rain switches or other outdoor water conservation topics contact the author at (941) 722-4524 or visit the website at <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu> and click on “water conservation.”