



# Make Every Drop Count

Seven steps to cut lawn water waste *and* your water bill.

- 1. How often should you water?** Don't make the mistake of watering every day you're allowed. Adjust your controller to meet the needs of the lawn and landscape. As a general rule, Florida lawns need water only every 3 to 5 days in the spring, every 5 to 7 days in the summer and every 10 to 14 days in the winter. Actually, in the winter, lawns can go two weeks between rainfall and watering events. So – skip a week in winter. To skip a week most controllers have to be turned off manually during the second week to skip. Then turn the controller back to automatic after your allowed watering day has passed on the second week. See the publication *Using the Irrigation Controller for a Better Lawn on Less Water* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep235>.
- 2. How long should you water?** Calibrate each sprinkler zone using 5 to 7 straight-sided catch cans (tuna or pet food cans) scattered randomly throughout zone one. (Sprinkler gauges work even better; contact the Extension Service office about getting a set). Turn that sprinkler zone on and time how long it takes to get an *average* depth of  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch of water in the cans. Set the controller for that many minutes in zone one. Repeat the procedure for the other sprinkler zones. Keep this setting year-round.
- 3. Install a rain sensor** switch to automatically turn off your watering system when it's raining.
- 4. Use a rain gauge** to keep up with current rainfall amounts. Skip watering after a  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch or more rainfall.
- 5. Don't mix sprinkler types** within a watering zone to reduce over watered/ under watered areas and dry spots.
  - Rotor or impact type sprinklers are for large, open spaces and apply about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch water an hour.
  - Sprayers are for smaller or odd shaped areas and apply about 2 inches water an hour.
  - Micro-irrigation systems are ideal for shrub beds, widely spaced plants and long, narrow plantings. Water is placed precisely at the plant's root zone leaving unplanted spaces dry.



6. **Monthly inspect**, adjust and repair leaks, over spray onto pavement, clogged, worn or damaged sprinklers and micro-irrigation parts. Keep plant material trimmed away from sprinkler spray paths. See the publication *Basic Repairs and Maintenance for Home Landscape Irrigation Systems* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae451>.
7. **Too much grass?** Reduce the area of water-thirsty plants in your lawn and replace part of it with beds of attractive shrubs in mulched beds. There is a great variety to choose from and most shrubs need only 10 inches of extra water a year (in addition to normal rainfall). Most grasses need 20 to 35 extra inches of water per year. Remember to reduce the number of sprinklers within the smaller grass area.



*If you'd like a free, no obligation, landscape/irrigation evaluation by our mobile irrigation lab call 941-742-5986 ext. 235 or 259. Actual water savings average about 26,000 gallons and \$200 per year for past participants.*



Want more information? Contact the writer, Jack Tichenor, Manatee County Extension Service, 1303 17<sup>th</sup> St. W., Palmetto, FL 34221, phone 941-742-5986 or see our website; <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu> and click on "Water Conservation Program". Fact sheet written January 4, 2011.