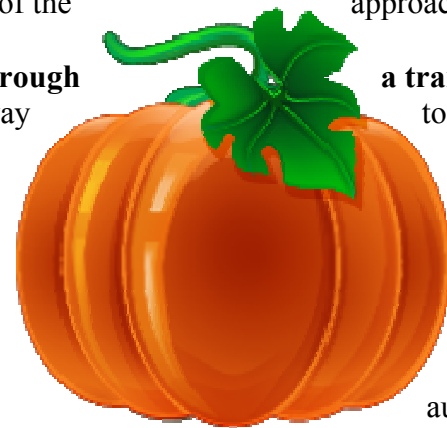




November Brings Changes & Challenges

Finally, after a long, hot summer, cooler weather is coming. Changes are in the air, outdoor activities are enjoyable again, and our thoughts begin to turn toward the joys of the holiday season. approaching

Many people don't realize it but their lawns are going through a transition too. High temperatures and frequent rains of summer have given way to cooler temperatures with slower growing conditions. Slower growing and landscapes have lower needs for water because the evaporation rate has slowed and the soil retains moisture longer. In winter, days are shorter and cooler and plants of all types are growing slowly or not at all. Well established lawns with deep root systems that needed water every few days during the summer can go to 2 to 3 weeks between watering in the winter. However, many people never compensate for this change of season and the timer on their irrigation system continues to water as often as water restrictions allow. This is a terrible waste of water (and your money) but it can also damage plants from root rot and other lawn diseases.









a transition
to cooler
lawns

In

root
go up
people
automatic

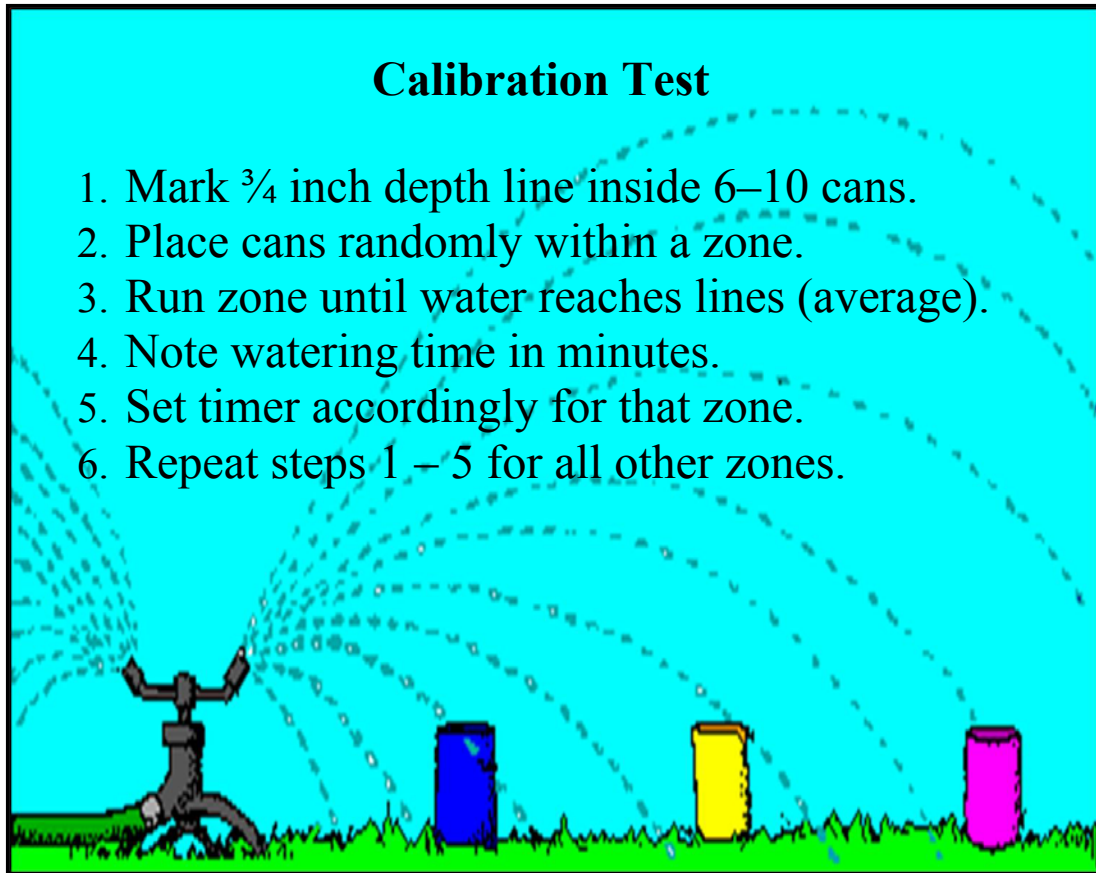
Nobody deliberately over waters. Over-irrigation is done with the best of intentions by folks just trying to take good care of their lawn and landscape. It is ironic that they end up having the most problems.

-  Outdoor water use accounts for about half of a residence's total water consumption.
-  Automatic sprinkler systems require frequent maintenance to work properly and reduce waste.
-  Sprinkler systems normally are poorly managed, usually wasting about a third of their water.
-  Sprinkler timers should be adjusted seasonally to not over or under water.
-  Overwatering wastes water and your money, encourages weeds, lawn diseases and overgrowth.
-  Lawn sprinkler problems can be resolved by an informed DIYer fixing one problem at a time.

So how often should you water in the winter? A lawn with a rather shallow root system (6" deep) needs water about once a week. However, a lawn with a 12 – 18 inch deep root system will suffice on one watering every 25 – 40 days in the coolest months like January and February. Check how deep the grass is rooted by taking a deep slice of grass and roots with a shovel. Stretching the time between lawn watering cycles will strengthen the lawn and cut your water cost. Watering on an as needed basis will encourage grass roots to go deeper. Apply ¾ inch of water year-round, just change how often you water. Let your lawn tell you when to water. Look for a blue-gray color and grass blades folded together; then its time to water again.

How do you know how to apply ¾ inch of water in each irrigation zone? This is usually confusing but actually it is simple. Do a calibration test. Just use straight sided cans or rain gauges to time how long it takes to put on ¾ inch of water. See the Calibration Test info box for the details.

Once you incorporate these principles you'll be on your way to a more drought tolerant, healthier lawn and perhaps with less water too.



Calibration Test

1. Mark $\frac{3}{4}$ inch depth line inside 6–10 cans.
2. Place cans randomly within a zone.
3. Run zone until water reaches lines (average).
4. Note watering time in minutes.
5. Set timer accordingly for that zone.
6. Repeat steps 1 – 5 for all other zones.

Setting irrigation timer for correct watering time in each irrigation zone.

For more information about watering, gardening and pests, or for upcoming events visit or call the Manatee County Extension Service office at 1303 17th Street W., Palmetto. Phone: (941) 722-4524, email: jtichenor@ifas.ufl.edu or visit the website at <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu>

Manatee County Extension Service fact sheet written October 10, 2008 by Jack Tichenor, Extension Agent, Manatee County Extension Service, 1303 17th Street W, Palmetto, FL 34221

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