



Resolve to Be Water Wise in 2008

Making your lawn more drought tolerant.

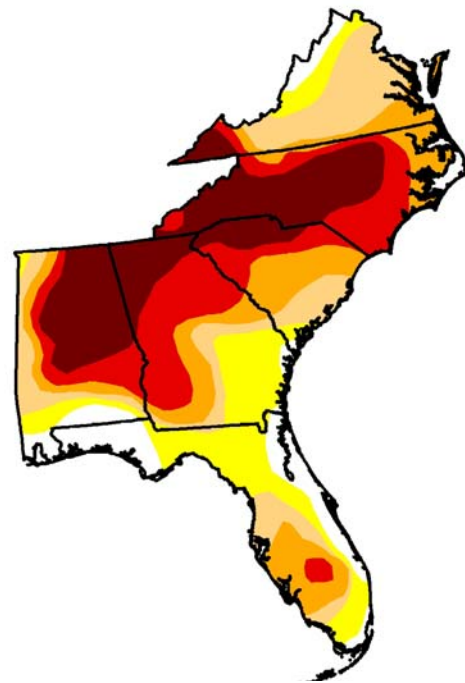
Realize it or not, we're in an ever-deepening drought condition. Rainfall for 2007 was 40 percent below normal and we were already short of rain in 2006. According to The U. S. Drought Monitor, Southwest Florida, including Manatee County is in a D2 or severe drought status. (See map). Unfortunately, the attitude of many is "As long as I turn on the faucet and water comes out everything must be OK; I pay my water bill and the drought doesn't affect me". It's not a contest to see if I can get all the water I want while I can.

Lawns are the single-largest irrigated crop in the United States, three-times more than corn.

Dear people, its time to accept responsibility that we're all water users, we're all in this together and everyone's water saving effort adds up.

A dilemma facing many home owners is - what to do with the thirsty landscape that came with their home? Additionally, some home owner associations expect wide expanses of lush, green grass. The automatic irrigation system that supports it may be silent and out of sight, but it uses about half the water in the average home! A study in the Tampa Bay area revealed about a third of the irrigation water is wasted.

Below are some tips to help get your landscape through the drought and with less water.



Intensity:



Southeast U.S. Drought Monitor Map - Jan., 2008
Courtesy: National Drought Mitigation Center

Water Management

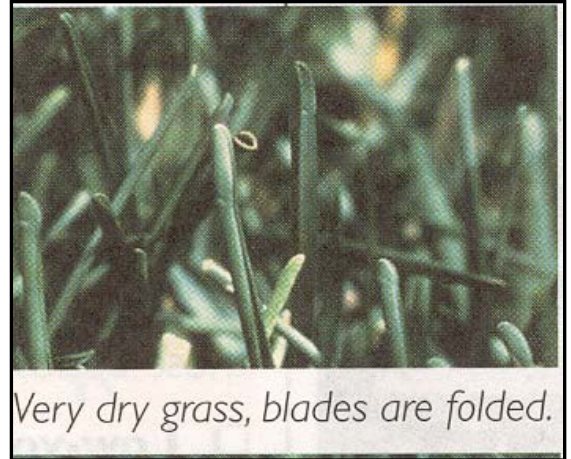
Watering Priorities: Water the highly visible and intensively managed areas first. Drought-sensitive plants, if kept, should be watered first. In well drained areas, consider replacing thirsty plants with drought tolerant plants grouped in mulched beds with micro-irrigation. Turf should have lower priority. Although some turf is drought sensitive, it is cheaper to replace than trees and shrubs. Plants in sandy soil and full sun are most susceptible to drought injury.

Time of Day: Water early in the morning. Less water loss occurs from evaporation and wind drift because of the cooler temperatures and lower wind. Watering restrictions do not allow watering between 8 am and 6 pm.

Watering Frequency: The cooler months are a good time to gradually reduce irrigation to train your lawn to need less water. Skip a week in the winter. Overwatering makes your lawn less drought tolerant and can encourage pests. Watering less often will encourage deeper rooting which makes grass more drought-tolerant. Your lawn needs water when:

- Grass blades are folded in half
- Grass blades are blue-gray
- A footprint remains on the lawn

How Long to Water: To determine how long to run sprinklers, place empty cans throughout the spray pattern of the sprinklers. Keep track of the time it takes to accumulate an average of $\frac{3}{4}$ " of water in the cans. Adjust the controller for that many minutes for that set of sprinklers or zone. Repeat the process for all other zones. Adjust as necessary after watching results. Sunny areas may need a little more water; shady or low lying areas such as swales may need less.



Very dry grass, blades are folded.

Seek the Leak: Automatic sprinkler systems require frequent maintenance. At least monthly, watch the sprinkler system while it is operating to discover leaks, broken or misadjusted sprinklers, blocked spray patterns and overspray onto buildings and paved areas. Look for soft, wet spots in the lawn which indicate underground leaks. Correct these problems to trim water waste and help improve uniformity.

Current Landscape Watering Restrictions

(unless where you live has stricter rules)

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

- *If your address (house number) ends in
...0 or 1, water once only on Monday
...2 or 3, water once only on Tuesday
...4 or 5, water once only on Wednesday
...6 or 7, water once only on Thursday
...8 or 9*, water once only on Friday
and locations without a discernible address
- *Water before 8 a.m. or after 6 p.m. (after 4p.m. on 2 acres or larger)*
- *Hand watering or micro-irrigation of non-lawn areas is allowed on any day.*
- *A 60 day establishment period is allowed for new plantings.*

For complete water restriction guidelines contact the Southwest Florida Water Management District at 800-423-1476 or at www.WaterMatters.org.

Turf

How Much is Enough? If the only time you walk on the grass is when you're mowing, perhaps you can reduce the portion of grass in your yard. Most grasses are the thirstiest plants in the landscape. St. Augustine grass is the most widely used lawn grass in Florida, but it does not have good drought tolerance. For the future, consider other grasses such as Bahia grass which has better drought tolerance. Consider alternative ground covers, enlarging mulched shrub beds and incorporating hardscape materials.



Asiatic Jasmine vine, a grass alternative

Mowing Frequency: Mow less frequently. Mowing stresses grass by increasing water loss from the cut grass blades and by reducing root growth.

Mowing Height: Raise the cutting height. Maintaining grass at a taller height will help it develop a deeper root system, which in turn makes the grass more tolerant of drought.

Mower Blades: Keep lawn mower blades sharp. Sharp blades make cleaner cuts, and cleaner cuts cause less plant stress and water loss.

New Planting: Delay new planting until the drought has passed. An exception could be replacing thirsty plants with more drought tolerant plants on micro-irrigation.

Lawn Pests: Pesticides should only be applied as needed and then only to the affected area of the lawn. Chemicals can cause damage to the grass, which can increase stress to the turf.

Bedding Plants, Shrubs and Trees

Mulch: Use 3 inches of mulch on entire beds of shrubs, trees (except citrus), annuals and perennials. Mulch reduces evaporation from soil, reduces weeds and moderates soil temperature which reduces stress on roots

Weed Control: Pull all weeds and unwanted plants; they steal water from desirable plants. Postpone the use of herbicides or weed killers until after the drought. The additional stress can reduce turf growth and its ability to compete with weeds.

Fertilizing: Don't fertilize during drought. Fertilizer promotes growth which increases the need for water.

Additional Tips

- Group or arrange landscape plants according to their water needs.
- Use micro-irrigation in plant beds and foundation plantings.
- Dig out water-robbing weeds and unwanted plants
- Use a rain barrel to collect rainwater
- Do not hose down your driveway and sidewalk. Use a broom or leaf blower.
- Use a shut-off nozzle on your hose that can also adjust down to a fine spray.
- Avoid recreational water toys that require a constant stream of water.
- Consider using a commercial car wash that recycles water. If you wash the car, park on the grass and use a hose with an automatic shutoff nozzle.
- If you have a swimming pool, consider a new water-saving pool filter.
- Cover your pool or spa to reduce evaporation.

Some information for this article was referenced from University of Florida EDIS publications *Tips for Maintaining Landscapes During Drought* by Robert J. Black, and *Managing Your Florida Lawn Under Drought*

Conditions by Jones, Lippi, and Trenholm and from the Southwest Florida Water Management District web site; <http://www.WaterMatters.org>.

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. in Palmetto. Phone: (941) 722-4524, or visit the website at <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/water.htm>.

Manatee County Extension Service fact sheet written January 14, 2008 by Jack Tichenor, Extension Agent, Manatee County Extension Service, 1303 17th Street W, Palmetto, FL 34221

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