

Phase III Water Restrictions for Broward County: Sustaining Your Landscape with Minimal Irrigation

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Broward home and business owners striving to maintain green landscapes will undoubtedly face additional challenges given ever-increasing water restrictions due to the current drought, one of the most serious in Florida's history (<http://www.sfwmd.gov/>). Water managers tell us that nearly 50% of local water usage is for landscape irrigation. In order to conserve water for drinking and other important human needs, everyone must take steps to use water responsibly. For those who irrigate their lawn and/or landscape, Broward County Extension Education offers the following suggestions derived from University of Florida/IFAS research-based scientific studies:

Lawn Management Recommendations

Residential and commercial turf that is in good condition can successfully be maintained under Phase III water restrictions as long as certain basic best management practices are followed. Lawns may likely suffer, particularly those that entered the drought in a weakened state due to weed, disease and/or insect problems, shallow root systems (from past frequent shallow waterings) or being routinely cut too short (less than 3 inches). We recommend the following practices to help your lawn survive Phase III restrictions:



- Brownd out and off color turf is often a sign of poor irrigation coverage (see photo). Most healthy St. Augustine grass will survive with as little as one inch of water per week. Make sure your irrigation system is functioning properly and is providing one inch per week with uniform coverage. Coverage and system run time can be determined using catch cups or tuna cans (see photo) placed across the turf, preferably between sprinkler heads. Repair any line breaks that may be wasting water, and replace heads that are malfunctioning. Determine the amount of time required to provide one inch of water in each can and adjust system timer accordingly.



- Adjust or replace full circle (360°) heads with 180° or 90° heads (photo on right) in the areas where water may be hitting pavement. Water hitting pavement is wasted water.



- Raise your mower deck to the highest setting. St. Augustine grass can be successfully maintained at a mowing height of 3 ½ - 4 inches. Higher mowing encourages deeper rooting and better drought tolerance.



- Reduce or postpone fertilization as it could cause injury to turf.
- Postpone herbicide applications or limit to spot treatments as certain weed killers can damage turf that is under stress.
- During a drought, chinch bug activity could increase. Monitor turf for signs of chinch bug activity and spot treat with a labeled insecticide as needed (*for details see UF-IFAS lawn insect management publication available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH034>). Avoid broadcast insecticide applications unless warranted.*
- Sharpen mower blades so they do not tear turf unnecessarily causing additional injury.

Landscape (Tree, Shrub and Groundcover) Recommendations

- Remove weeds from plant beds as they take precious water from desirable ornamentals. Either pull them up or spray them with Roundup; do not to let any of the herbicide come into contact with desirable plant material. Follow up with an application of clean organic mulch (see photo) applied to a depth of approximately 3 inches. This will help smother small, recently germinated weeds, suppress the emergence of new weeds and conserve soil moisture.
- Keep mulch at least 3 inches away from tree trunks. A number of different mulching materials are available. Mulch made from recycled *Melaleuca* contains chemicals that may deter the germination of weed seeds, saving you the time and expense of further weeding.
- Monitor irrigation output and coverage as previously discussed in the turf section. Reduce irrigation frequency in zones where drought-tolerant species have been planted.
- Pay close attention to the health and hydration state of newly installed ornamental plants. Such plants were accustomed to daily irrigation in the nursery and they must now adapt to greatly reduced soil moisture levels. Such plants will be vulnerable to rapid wilting and desiccation until their root systems become established.



- Avoid heavy pruning of water-stressed trees and shrubs. Loss of large amounts of foliage can deplete carbohydrate reserves (food storage) and weaken woody ornamentals. Pruning also stimulates sprouting and subsequent re-growth could increase a plant's overall demand for water.
- Postpone or reduce fertilization of drought stressed trees and shrubs. Moisture is needed for activation and uptake may be reduced when soils are dry. Plants exhibiting signs of nutrient deficiency would be an exception.
- Consider the use of attractive rain barrels to collect any rainwater we receive and allow you to use that for hand watering your special specimen plants.
- Where feasible, replace drought-prone narrow strips of sod (those less than 10 feet wide), with drought tolerant native shrubs and small trees, as suggested by the University of Florida-IFAS *Florida Yards and Neighborhoods* Program.



(<http://www.floridayards.org>). A handy guide that outlines all the Florida-Friendly Yard programs may be obtained freely from <http://www.floridayards.org/landscape/FYN-Handbook.pdf> , as well as a quick summary of it available from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP079> .

- Replace exotic, annuals (bottom-left) with perennial native species (bottom-right). They will require less water, lower maintenance, less fertilizer and provide better food and cover for wildlife.



Blanket flower
(*Gaillardia pulchella*)

- Strive to create a mosaic of different trees, shrubs, ground covers, native grasses and wildflowers. Landscapes lacking diversity in species (monocultures) may be at increased risk of disease and insect infestation and do not provide the same benefits to wildlife as diverse plant communities.

By following the above-mentioned best management practices, you can improve the appearance and drought tolerance of your lawn and landscape while saving time and water. Be smart. Be waterwise!

For additional information, contact the Broward County Extension Education Division at (954) 370-3725 or visit our website at www.broward.org.