

Helpful Tips

Watering Your Florida Lawn

Watering is an important part in maintaining a healthy lawn and homeowners should understand how to irrigate correctly. Too much water is damaging to turfgrass and is often the underlying cause of lawn failure. Problems with overwatering include:

- A less developed and shorter root system, which has less capacity to seek out water and nutrients at lower soil depths and has less overall stress resistance.
- An overly succulent shoot system, susceptible to disease and insect infestation.
- Weaker cell walls in the shoot tissue, which reduce the strength of leaf tissue.
- Buildup of excessive thatch, particularly in St. Augustine grass.

Light, frequent watering is inefficient and encourages shallow root systems. Excessive irrigation, which keeps the root system saturated with water, is also harmful to the lawn.

How often should I water?

University of Florida guidelines call for watering lawns on an "as needed" basis. This can be determined by observing the first signs of wilt. The signs that you need to look for are:

- Leaf blades folded in half lengthwise in an attempt to conserve water.
- The grass takes on a blue-gray tint.
- Footprints or tire tracks remain visible on the grass long after being made.

How much water should I apply?

An accurate watering schedule would apply 3/4 inch of water as needed. Do not water again until signs of wilt are noticed.

How long will it take my irrigation system to apply 3/4 inch of water?

There are several factors to consider when setting the run time on your irrigation clock. Each homeowner will have a different situation with their irrigation system and for these reasons we cannot recommend a general set time. These reasons include:

- Different types of irrigation systems.
- Different types of irrigation heads. Rotor will dispense more water than a pop-up head.
- Varied amounts of water pressure.

To determine how long your system will take to apply 3/4 inch of water follow these simple steps:

1. Set a can with a flat bottom and at least 1 inch in depth in your lawn.
2. Run your system until it fills the can to 3/4 inch.
3. Mark the time needed to achieve this level.

**If you have both rotors and pop-up heads then you will have to repeat these steps for each.*

What time of the day should I water?

The best time for lawn irrigation is in the early morning hours. Watering during the day wastes water due to excessive evaporation and can scald the lawn when temperatures are high. Watering in late afternoon or late morning may be detrimental if it extends the time the lawn is naturally wet from dew. This extended "dew period" can accelerate disease occurrence.

How your turf grass affects your landscape plants

Its important to remember that a sprinkler zone may be irrigating not only turf, but landscape plants as well. These plants may have different irrigation requirements and may be over- or underwatered if irrigation is based on turfgrass needs. This factor emphasizes the importance of good landscape design and irrigation planning, where all components of the system must be considered.

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Any micro-environmental effects in the landscape that affect irrigation requirements

Not every part of your lawn will have the same irrigation requirements. For instance, if grass is planted close to the house, it will be in shade for some portion of the day. Trees or large shrubbery can also cause shade, and some mature canopies actually shade a portion of the lawn for an entire day. In these cases, it may be very difficult to grow an acceptable stand of turf, and a different groundcover may be a better choice. If you choose to grow grass in the shade, you must reduce irrigation to this part of your lawn.

Why do I have brown spots in my lawn?

Localized dry areas can occur in your lawn even though you have an irrigation system. Here are some reasons why?

- Irrigation is blocked by an obstacle.
- Irrigation is being redirected by wind.
- Sprinkler head may be broken or out of adjustment.
- Area may not be getting 3/4 inch of water when irrigated.

When a brown area occurs in your lawn check to see if this grass show signs of wilt as discussed earlier. Another sure way to check if it is in fact drought follow these simple steps:

1. Dig down in the brown area at least 4 inches and feel if the soil is dry.
2. Dig down in a green area of the lawn at least 4 inches and see if the soil is moist.

If you find that the brown area is dry and the green area is moist then you most certainly have an area of your lawn in drought. To correct this situation set a flat bottom can in the brown area and run your system to check uniformity and coverage. If you turn on your system and find that the sprinkler heads are working fine and the coverage looks good then you are either not getting 3/4 inch per watering and/or not watering this area often enough. You also may find that this area is what is called a "hot spot" in your lawn. That means this area may just require more water than the rest of your lawn and hand watering this particular area is needed.

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