



## Landscape Drought Recommendations

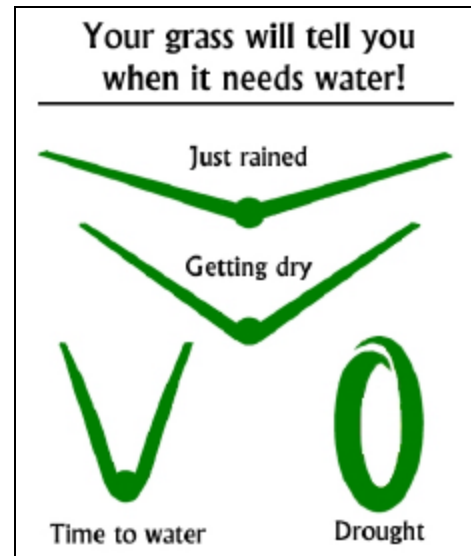
Adrian Hunsberger<sup>1</sup> and Jody Haynes<sup>2</sup>

### Irrigation:

- Water grass only when necessary (see diagram at right). You have seven days to water once grass has reached permanent wilting point.
- Water grass and landscape plants a maximum of 1" once per week if needed. One inch of water penetrates one foot of soil, which is where the majority of plant roots are, including tree roots. Watering deeply (1" of water per application) encourages grass and landscape plants to develop deeper root systems.
- Water fruit trees a maximum of 1" once per week during fruit set.
- Use soaker hoses for bedding plants.
- Use catch cans to calibrate automatic irrigation systems.



- Adjust sprinklers to avoid spraying water on sidewalks and streets or into gutters.
- Check irrigation system for leaks or clogs to ensure uniform water distribution.
- Install an automatic timer.
- Install a rain shutoff device, or check to make sure existing device is working properly and is not blocked by structures, vegetation or house eaves.



- Check hose and faucet washers annually, replacing them when worn.
- Retrofit existing irrigation system for low volume, such as microjet emitters or subsurface drip irrigation.



- Shut off fountains and other water features.
- Use waste water free of harmful compounds (e.g., borax and trisodium phosphate).
- Postpone installing irrigation systems until water restrictions are lifted; and then design a low-volume system.
- Collect rainwater by placing buckets near the house eaves (where rain is concentrated) and store the water inside a building in closed containers such as used gallon milk/water

containers. Label the containers “For landscape use only”.

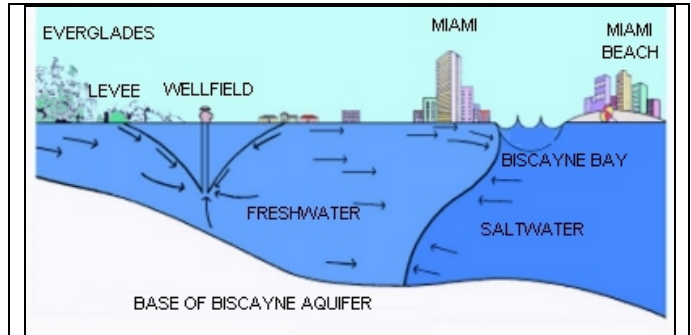
- Use a rain gauge, and do not irrigate if enough rain has fallen.
- Monitor the weather; don’t water if rain is predicted.

*Planting/Maintenance:*

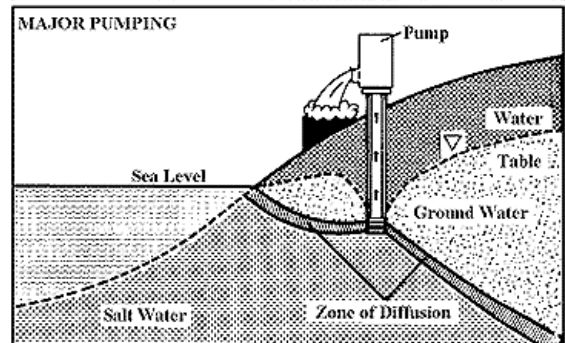
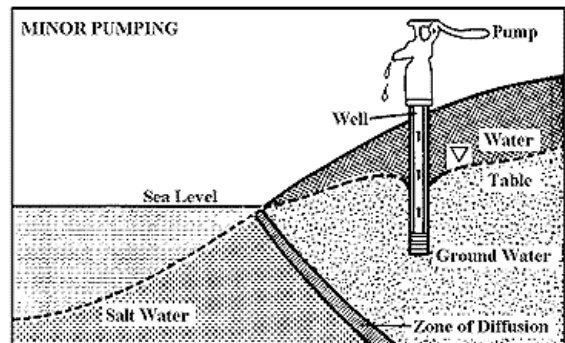
- Increase mowing height of lawns to 3-4” to encourage grass to develop deeper root systems.
- Keep the lawn mower blade sharp; sharp blades make cleaner cuts that cause less water loss than dull blades.
- Control weeds, since they use water that would otherwise be available for desirable plants.
- Do not fertilize turf or landscape plants until the rainy season starts; fertilizer promotes plant growth, thereby increasing the need for water.
- Apply 3-4” of mulch to landscaped beds and around shrubs and trees, keeping mulch 2” away from trunks and stems.
- Established trees or shrubs usually don’t need additional water.
- Remove plants that are growing poorly, and wait for summer rains to install new plantings.
- Once summer rains start, plant drought tolerant plants suited for your area. Lists of drought-tolerant plants are available through your local County Extension Office.
- Plan for drought when designing your landscape by grouping plants with similar watering needs together.
- Move potted plants into shadier areas of the yard.
- Remove “thirsty” plants or dig them up and place them in a shadier location.
- Mulch potted plants using organic mulches, including grass clippings (if herbicides are not used on the lawn).

*If you use well water:*

- Monitor well water at least twice a month for saltwater intrusion; since salts will cause injury to many landscape plants. Contact the Water and Sewer department for water testing.
- Irrigation using well water must also follow the restrictions set forth by the South Florida Water Management District.



**Normal situation:** Higher pressure of fresh-water keeps saltwater from intruding into well-fields.



**Current situation:** Saltwater intrusion is beginning to occur in some coastal areas due to excessive use of freshwater.



1. Urban Horticulture Agent II, University of Florida / Miami-Dade County Extension.
2. Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program Extension Agent, University of Florida / Miami-Dade County Extension.

Photos and Graphics Courtesy UF-IFAS