Experiment with gradual reductions in irrigation to see if plants can tolerate less water. Some people use no irrigation, but have healthy plants.

Water less in cooler months (November–March). Turn off automatic watering systems in summer if rainfall is consistent and in winter months when little water evaporates.

Make sure your sprinkler system is applying uniform coverage and operating properly. This single action proves to be one of the best ways to conserve water.

Check your system periodically for broken heads or leaks.

To Sprinkle or Not to Sprinkle
You are probably familiar with sprinklers that are part of an automated system. In some landscapes, such as a lawn or annual flower bed, those kinds of sprinklers can be the best watering method. For other landscape areas, learn about water-conserving micro-irrigation systems.

Micro-irrigation systems deliver small volumes of water directly to the root zone through low-flow-rate emitters, such as micro-spray jets, bubblers or drip tubes.

Florida Yard Tip:

Soil Moisture
If the soil in your yard appears dry, that does not mean the root zone is dry. A soil coring tool like the one shown pulls up a soil sample that allows you to see and feel the moisture in a plant’s root zone. A soil core also reveals whether you are watering so much that water is wasted below the root zone. Using a soil corer can help you judge when to turn off an automatic watering system. Look for coring tools at most irrigation and some garden supply stores.
ATTRACT WILDLIFE

Florida has the third most diverse wildlife population of any state. But rapidly growing urban development, particularly in coastal communities, is destroying native wildlife habitat. As our communities expand, we lament the loss of birds and other wildlife, but often our own yards are partly to blame.

Your Florida-Friendly Yard can provide habitat for wildlife in two major ways:

1. By increasing biodiversity, in part by using a variety of plants in your yard’s design.
2. By creating landscaped islands and natural corridors of plants that connect bordering properties. Animals use these corridors to travel from one natural area to another, which in turn fosters and benefits wildlife on a larger neighborhood scale.

As you create a new landscape or improve your existing one, add a few features for wildlife, and you will bring your yard to life with birds, butterflies and beneficial insects. Just remember that food, water and cover attract wildlife, but providing habitat is not enough. You also need to maintain your yard so the impact it has on the environment is minimal.

Try a few of these ideas for luring wildlife to your yard:

- **Food** — Provide food in the form of plants that bear seed, fruit, foliage or flowers that you’re willing to have eaten by birds, larval butterflies (caterpillars) or adult butterflies. Berries, fleshy fruits, nuts and acorns are all treats for wildlife. Wildlife find meadow grasses especially attractive, and they add a graceful feature to any landscape.

- **Running Water** — The sound of running water will attract wildlife to your yard. This sound could come from a natural feature, such as a pond, creek or other body of fresh water. A fountain will also beckon wildlife. Even a simple

Watering Tips

- Reduce the need for watering by choosing water-efficient and drought-tolerant plants, including those native to your site, and plant them in the right place. If you group plants according to their water (and light) needs, you can simplify watering methods and systems. For example, separate turf irrigation zones from tree and shrub zones.

- If you have an automatic sprinkler system, install a rain shutoff device or sensor that will override the system when it rains. Set this device to shut off your system when half an inch of rain has fallen. Florida law requires rain shutoff devices on all automatic sprinkler systems installed since 1991. Your county’s UF/IFAS Extension office, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or a certified irrigation professional can provide technical assistance.

- Water in the early morning (4–7 a.m.). This is the most efficient time because temperature and wind speeds are at their lowest, which reduces evaporation. Also, grasses are less susceptible to fungus if water is applied at the time that dew normally forms.

- Avoid watering between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Temperature and wind speeds are at their highest during this time — so evaporative losses are more likely.

- Follow this simple watering schedule for grass: Apply ½” to ¾” of water when grass shows signs of distress (blush-gray color/folded leaf blades). Do not water again until symptoms reappear.

- If rain is predicted within the next 24 hours, don’t irrigate.

- Use a rain gauge to measure rainfall volume.

http://www.flstate.org/
WATER EFFICIENTLY

Even though watering restrictions are commonplace throughout Florida, many homeowners still overwater. Overwatering does more than deplete the water supply; it also makes plants prone to pests and adds to stormwater runoff, which pollutes our water systems. By choosing and operating a watering system correctly, you can reduce water bills, insect and disease problems, and maintenance requirements. For example, the more you water your lawn, the faster it grows and the more it needs to be mowed.

Most watering restrictions limit irrigation to certain days and times. But realize that even if it is your assigned day to irrigate, that does not mean you must irrigate. Scheduled watering can waste time, money and resources. Don’t let the calendar tell you when to water — look to your plants for telltale signs of water needs. Water lawns when 50 percent of the lawn shows signs of wilt: leaf blades folded in half, blue-gray color and footprints remain on the lawn. Water established bedding plants and shrubs when you see early signs of wilting.

FYN Glossary Box

Wilting: the drooping of plant parts, especially leaves, generally because of a lack of water

FYN Glossary Box

Chrysalis: the pupa (last stage before adult) of a butterfly

bath that captures rainwater can suffice. Empty and clean your birdbath every few days. Do not clean it with soap or bleach; just physically scrub all surfaces with a brush or scouring-type sponge. Changing water regularly prevents mosquito breeding and bacterial contamination.

Birds — To attract birds, design planted areas that include a tree canopy, smaller understory trees and shrubs, and grasses or flowers. Allow grasses and flowers to go to seed on occasion — this is a real draw for birds.

Butterflies — A combination of both larval (caterpillar) and nectar plants will attract a variety of butterflies to your yard. Nectar plants are those that unfurl flowers, and profuse bloomers are even better. See the plant list at the back of this handbook or consult your county’s UF/IFAS Extension office for examples of plants that attract butterflies.

Caterpillars — These are the larvae of butterflies and moths. Each butterfly species lays its eggs on a preferred host plant, which may differ from the adults’ preferred nectar source. The caterpillars of butterflies must eat to grow large enough to form a chrysalis, so they often strip larval plants of leaves. If you want to attract butterflies to your yard, expect a certain level of damage. One way to keep outdoor living areas attractive and to cultivate a
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Florida Yards & Neighborhoods

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For Additional Information:

For references on the information contained in this book and links to additional resources on each of the nine Florida-friendly landscaping principles, including many articles on the EDIS website (Electronic Data Information Source of UF/IFAS Extension), go to http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu and follow the link to the FYN Handbook. You can also visit http://FloridaYards.org for more information on Florida-friendly landscaping, or contact your county’s UF/IFAS Extension office and ask for the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program. See http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/offices.html or check the government pages in your phone book to find your county’s Extension office.

Florida Yards and Neighborhoods:
Create a Florida-Friendly Yard

Yards and landscapes can be a positive asset to Florida. You can design and maintain your own Florida-Friendly Yard by following the simple, common sense practices in this book. You will learn the basics of designing a landscape featuring carefully selected plants suited to Florida’s unique climate, natural conditions and wildlife.

We offer you cost-saving tips that, if implemented properly, will help you reduce water, fertilizer and pesticide use. There is also a helpful section for waterfront homeowners that addresses the special concerns of shoreline landscape management.

Whether you are starting from scratch with a new landscape or considering changes to an existing yard, the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Handbook offers helpful concepts, tools and techniques for creating your own Florida-Friendly Yard. We hope you enjoy the publication and we look forward to assisting you in creating an aesthetically pleasing landscape that will also help to protect Florida’s natural resources.

http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu

FloridaYards.org