Timely Tips for Dry May Lawns
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May is the time of the year when Florida experiences the peak of the dry season. The hot, sunny weather dries out lawns and gardens quickly with little or no rainfall relief in sight. The rainy season usually doesn’t begin until June. Additionally, Florida’s native sandy soil retains moisture poorly so lawns, gardens, farms and ranches can become very stressed. A well-designed, maintained, and managed irrigation system is critical for the lawns that are not able to survive on rainfall only. Automatic irrigation systems make it easier to deal with the dry season but require periodic inspection, adjustments, and repairs. Following are some tips to make every drop count.

How Often to Water: Water established lawns thoroughly but infrequently rather than shallow and often. Watering one day a week encourages deeper rooting and builds drought tolerance. See the UF publication Let Your Lawn Tell You When to Water at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep054.

How Long to Water: To determine how long to run sprinklers for proper watering, place empty cans throughout the spray pattern of zone one. Keep track of the time it takes to accumulate an average of ¾” of water in the cans. That should be the run time for that zone. Repeat the process for all other zones. See Using Your Irrigation Controller for a Better Lawn on Less Water at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep235.

When to Water: Less water loss occurs from evaporation and wind drift because of the cooler temperatures and lower wind during early morning hours.

Watch for Wasters: Look at the sprinkler system while it is operating to locate leaks, broken or misadjusted sprinklers, blocked spray patterns, and overspray onto buildings and paved areas. Correct these problems to trim water waste and help eliminate dry spots in the lawn. See Basic Repairs & Maintenance for Home Landscape Irrigation Systems at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae451.

Low Volume Irrigation: Watering thirsty turf areas with traditional sprinklers separately from shrub beds on low volume irrigation provides a way to save water and improve plant health. Foundation plantings, shrub and flower beds and garden areas can be watered very efficiently by using micro-sprayers, drippers, or drip tubing to put water only at the plant, leaving the unplanted spaces dry. See Micro-Irrigation, a Guide to the Basics at http://watermatters.org (click on “publications”).

For more information or for a schedule of free classes call the number above or go to the website at http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/ and click on Water Conservation Program on the bottom left side of page.