

Basic Recommendations for Landscape Care



This information is intended for use in Duval County. Florida is a very diverse state with different growing conditions. If you garden outside of Northeast Florida, check with your local UF/IFAS Extension agent for assistance.

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Water

Turf

The best practice to save water and money in the landscape is to turn off the irrigation system and water only when the grass shows signs of needing water- such as leaf curl, blue coloring, or footprints that stay depressed after a couple minutes of walking on the grass.

When irrigating, apply $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ inches of water two times a week during the growing season. Less, if there has been rainfall. Use a rain gauge to monitor rainfall. In the winter months, reduce water to once a week. It is natural for the grass to brown, as it enters a period of dormancy. Watering in the early morning hours is best to prevent issues with fungus.

How do you know how much water your irrigation system is putting out? Set out empty tuna fish or cat food cans at random and turn on the irrigation system. Then measure in inches how much water you caught. This is an inexpensive, easy way to calibrate your system.

Ornamentals

Newly planted plant material will always need supplemental water until it gets established. Also, ornamentals will need extra water in times of drought. How much and how often really depends on what that particular plant's water needs are. For example, hydrangeas will need more water than a holly. It is very hard to give specifics, however, plants with thicker stems or waxy leaves will usually

require less water than those with thinner leaves and more tender stems. I would suggest getting to know your plants' signs of wilt. The Florida Friendly Landscaping program has a free app to download with suggestions for plant material that need little irrigation after establishment. Search for FFL Plants wherever you download your apps. If your ornamentals are getting watered automatically when your turf is irrigated, that should be enough water.

Fertilizer

Turf

For St. Augustinegrass, apply no more than 1 lb. of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet with a fertilizer that contains at least 30% of slow-release material. If your fertilizer doesn't contain 30% slow-release material, then reduce your nitrogen to half a pound per 1,000 sq. ft. You can apply fertilizer 2-4 times per year, but only during the growing season and never before a heavy rain. If you have zoysia grass, fertilize no more than 3 times per year. In Duval County, mid-April is a good time to make the first application, and mid-September is a good time to make the last application for the year.

How do you know how much fertilizer to use? Look at the first number on the fertilizer bag and reference a chart to save yourself from a lot of math. Go to this publication and click on Table 4. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/LH014>

Ornamentals

Most shrubs in the landscape do not require

routine fertilization. If you are happy with the appearance of your plants, then you have no need to fertilize. There are a few plants, such as gardenias, that are the exception. Palm trees have specific fertilizer requirements that include slow-release nitrogen, phosphorus, and magnesium.

Mulch

Landscape beds should be mulched to maintain a 2-3" depth to conserve water, protect trunks and roots, and reduce weed pressure. Do not pile mulch up right at the base of the plant. Any natural mulch such as pine bark, pine straw or shredded hardwood will work. However, UF doesn't recommend cypress mulch as some of it is produced using unsustainable methods.

Weed Control

Turf

A healthy, thick stand of turf growing in sun, not shade, is the first step in preventing weeds in your grass.

If weeds have been an issue in the past, then apply a pre-emergent herbicide around March 1, or before if temperatures get up to 65 degrees for 3 or 4 days in a row.

Ornamentals

Mulching your beds is a crucial step in keeping down the number of weeds you have to deal with. Occasionally spending a few minutes to hand pull weeds is your best tactic after you have your mulch in place. Non-selective herbicides such as glyphosate can be used if weeds are out of hand but take care not to let any of the spray drift onto the leaves of any plants or turf you want to keep. Remember, the label is the law when using chemicals! Read it and follow the directions.

Mowing

Most species of St. Augustinegrass should be mowed at a height of 3.5-4". Zoysia grass should be mowed at 2-2.5". You should always let the grass clippings fall back into the lawn. Mow frequently enough so that you are never removing more than 1/3 of the leaf blade at a time. Sweep clippings back into the lawn and never let them go into a storm drain.