A truly efficient way to use water in a yard is to design the yard so that it thrives predominantly on rainfall. Even if your yard has a lawn and specialty gardens, it is possible to design it as a Florida Yard in which you can water the plants "as needed."

However, even an ideal landscape design can be over-watered. That's why many of the actions in this section deal with sprinkler systems. It's extremely important that each irrigation zone is set to meet the needs of the plants in that area. For example, a lawn in full sun will demand more frequent irrigation than an established plant bed of shrubs and groundcovers.

![Rain-sensing shut-off devices for automatic sprinkler systems.](image)

**Mowing Heights**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inches</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grass Type</th>
<th>Mowing Height</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahia</td>
<td>3&quot;-4&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Augustine</td>
<td>2½&quot;-4&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centipede</td>
<td>1½&quot;-2&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermuda</td>
<td>¾&quot;-1½&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Give your lawn a break during the Winter!

Avoid the temptation to keep your lawn green and growing year-round. Lawns go semi-dormant in central and northern Florida from November through March. During this time, the lawn will only need water every ten days, at most.

Let your plants tell you when they need water — and then water them correctly.

See the FY&N Handbook for ways to tell when your lawn and plants need water. The Handbook also shows you how to calibrate your sprinkler system so your plants get the water they need.

FLORIDA YARD ACTIONS

- Design and maintain a yard that thrives predominantly on rainfall once plants are established. Credit: 6 inches.

- Water your lawn and other plants only when they show signs of stress. (Comply with any existing watering restrictions in your community.) Credit: 3 inches.

- Calibrate your sprinkler(s) to apply 1/2 to 3/4 inch of water per application. Credit: 3 inches.

- Mow lawns high to encourage a deeper, more drought and pest tolerant root system. A higher cut also shades out weeds. Cut no more than 1/3 the height of grass blades with each mowing. Credit: 2 inches.

- Put a rain gauge in your yard to track rainfall to avoid unnecessary watering. Credit: 2 inches.

- Connect an automatic rain shut-off device to your sprinkler system’s timer. Set the device to 1/2 inch so it will override your system’s timer when enough rain has fallen. Replace back-up batteries in your system’s timer each year before the rainy season. Check to see if the shut-off device is working properly. Credit: 2 inches.

- Design or modify your sprinkler system to water lawn areas separately from plant beds requiring less water. Credit: 2 inches.

- Use a drip or micro-spray irrigation system to more efficiently water plant and flower beds. Credit: 2 inches.

___ Total Inches
Mulch keeps moisture in the soil and moderates soil temperature. Mulch also reduces erosion and weeds. Mulch is often sold in bags, by the yard or by the “truckload.” So, how much mulch do you need for your yard?

MULCH: How much do you need to have the recommended depth of 3 inches?

By the bag:
1 bag containing 2 cubic feet covers 8 square feet (2 ft. X 4 ft.)

By the bale:
1 bale of pine straw covers 18 to 20 square feet.

By the yard:
1 cubic yard covers 108 square feet (9 ft. x 12 ft.)

By the truckload:
1 mini pickup holds $1\frac{1}{2}$ yards and covers 162 square feet (9 ft. x 18 ft.)

1 full-sized pickup holds $2\frac{1}{2}$ yards and covers 270 square feet (9 ft. x 30 ft.)

If you are buying bags containing 2 cubic feet of mulch, you can use the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your plant bed in square feet</th>
<th>The depth of mulch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 sq. ft.</td>
<td>2 bags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 sq. ft.</td>
<td>4 bags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 sq. ft.</td>
<td>9 bags</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a Florida Yard, grass clippings, leaves and yard trimmings are recycled rather than thrown away. By recycling yard debris, we gain free mulch and return valuable nutrients to the soil.

Composting is a great American tradition that people are rediscovering. Turn plant and kitchen scraps into rich soil for your indoor and outdoor plants.

**FLORIDA YARD ACTIONS**

- Keep a 2-3 inch layer of organic mulch over the roots of trees, shrubs, and in plant beds. Remember to leave at least 2 inches of space between the mulch and the plant's trunk or stem. (Don't mulch citrus trees.) Credit: 2 inches.

- Replenish mulch once or twice a year, as needed to maintain a 2-3 inch depth. Credit: 1 inch.

- Create self-mulching areas under trees where leaves can stay where they fall. Credit: 1 inch.

- Use by-product or alternative mulches such as pine bark, Eucalyptus and Melaleuca, or use recycled mulches when available from your community. Credit: 1 inch.

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**FLORIDA YARD ACTIONS**

- Recycle grass clippings by leaving them on the lawn. Mulching lawn mowers or mulching blades are not necessary. Credit: 2 inches.

- Use fallen leaves and pine needles as mulch under trees and shrubs. They make an attractive, natural mulch and are free. (If you have more leaves than you can use, share them with a friend or neighbor.) Credit: 2 inches.

- Create and maintain a compost pile with kitchen scraps and yard waste (no animal products, please). Credit: 3 inches.

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Pull mulch away from stems and trunks to avoid stem rot.
any trees and landscape plants demand little or no fertilizer once they are established and mature. In fact, fertilizers can be hazardous to the health of your yard and the environment when they are misused.

When over-applied, fertilizers aggravate insect and disease problems and force excessive growth which must be mowed or pruned. Excess fertilizers can run off yards into waterways or leach into aquifers, polluting drinking water.

How much fertilizer should you buy?

It's Spring, and Bob and Jane want to fertilize their lawn. Here are the steps they take to determine how much fertilizer to buy:

- They measure their lawn area and calculate square feet:
  - Backyard: 60 x 50 feet (60 x 50 = 3,000 square feet)
  - Frontyard: 50 x 40 feet (50 x 40 = 2,000 square feet)
  - Total square footage = 5,000 square feet.

- They shop for fertilizers which contain slow-release nitrogen and find two products priced the same, a 10-2-10 and a 16-4-8.
  - The 16-4-8 contains 16% nitrogen, 4% phosphorus, 8% potassium.
  - The 10-2-10 contains 10% nitrogen, 2% phosphorus, 10% potassium.

- They use this simple formula to determine the application rate of each fertilizer:

  100 divided by the % N = the amount of fertilizer to spread over 1,000 square feet.

- Therefore, 100 ÷ 10 = 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet (for the 10-2-10) and 100 ÷ 16 = 6 pounds per 1,000 square feet (for the 16-4-8).

- Their 5,000 square foot lawn would require 50 pounds of 10-2-10 (5 x 10) but only 30 pounds of the 16-4-8 (5 x 6).

- Both products contain 40 pounds of fertilizer. Bob and Jane save money by purchasing one bag of 16-4-8 instead of two bags of 10-2-10.

- Before spreading the fertilizer, they calibrate the fertilizer spreader to apply 6 pounds per 1,000 square feet. (Hint: This information is available from the spreader’s manufacturer or the Cooperative Extension Services.)
The Fertilizer Tag:

Florida law requires that fertilizer manufacturers supply a tag with every bag of fertilizer. There’s a wealth of information on the tag once you understand how to interpret it. The FY&N Handbook helps to demystify much of the information you will find.

Use fertilizers in which 30% or more of the nitrogen is in a slow- or controlled-release form.

Fertilizer Facts:

1. **Fertilizer is not plant food.**
   Food to a plant is the sugars it makes through photosynthesis. Fertilizer nutrients are used in this process, but a lawn or plant growing poorly in too much shade will not grow better if fertilized.

2. **The truth about “100% Organic.”**
   The “100% Organic” claim often refers only to the nitrogen in the bag. Furthermore, the nitrogen can be derived from natural products such as manure or it can be from synthetic chemicals such as urea. Read the label to determine where the “organic” nitrogen is coming from.

3. **Buy nutrients, not fertilizer.**
   Many fertilizers contain a number of plant nutrients even though only one or two may be needed. What plant response do you want – greener growth? more flowers or fruits? Know which nutrients will provide these responses and buy only those.

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**FLORIDA YARD ACTIONS**

- Fertilize only as needed to maintain the health of lawns and landscape plants. If plants show signs of stress, such as yellow leaves or stunted growth, identify the problem before applying fertilizer. Do not exceed the rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per application. Credit: 2 inches.

- Use slow-release fertilizers. Buy fertilizers that contain 30% or more of the nitrogen in slow-release forms. Credit: 2 inches.

- Use iron (ferrous sulfate or chelated iron) instead of nitrogen to make your lawn green during the summer. Credit: 1 inch.

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**Slow-release Fertilizers**

When fertilizer nutrients are in “slow release” forms, they are available to plants over a longer period of time and less nutrients are wasted or lost as pollutants. Look for these terms on the product or fertilizer tag:

- Timed-release, slow-release or controlled-release.
- Water insoluble nitrogen, Activated sludge, Sulfur-coated urea (SCU), IBDU, Ureaform (UF), Nitroform, or Polymer-Plastic-Resin-coated urea.