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

n 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.

n 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.

n 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.

n 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

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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 (bluish-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.

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UF Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program:

http://www.ffisstate.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.

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

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

http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/fl_habitat_program.htm
crop of butterflies is to intersperse larval and nectar plants in a bed. Or devote an entire planting area that is out of view to larval plants.

- **Snags** — Leave dead trees in place if they do not create a hazard. Many birds use snags for perching, nesting and feeding.

- **Manage Pets** — If you permit pets to harass wildlife, you will only frustrate any efforts you make toward attracting wildlife. This is especially true for house cats allowed to roam in yards. If you permit your cat to wander in your yard, it is better not to try to attract birds and other animals whose lives would be in danger.

- **Reduce Insecticide Use** — Each time you apply an insecticide to your landscape, you reduce insect populations, which form an important food source for birds. Some chemicals also can poison birds and other animals that feed on affected insects.

- **Reduce the Amount of Mowed Lawn Area** — Over time, unmowed areas contain more plant species than mowed areas. Reduce the mowed area around your house, especially in low-traffic areas, such as corners of the yard. In other spots, trade turf for diverse plant species that will create shelter and food for many animal species. Plant diversity attracts more wildlife species.

- **Increase Vertical Layering** — Plant a variety of plants in different sizes and heights. This provides more cover and feeding opportunities for wildlife species.

- **Extension’s Urban Wildlife Program** — For more information on wildlife in Florida and help in creating a wildlife-friendly landscape, visit the Florida Wildlife Extension website: [http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/landscaping.htm](http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/landscaping.htm). Your yard could be recognized as a Florida Backyard Landscape for Wildlife.