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.
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

http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/ff_habitat_program.htm
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 (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.

http://www.flstate.org/
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.
Although micro-irrigation equipment releases small amounts of water, it does not prevent overwatering. Nutrient leaching can occur if the system runs for excessively long time periods and waterlogs soil. Sandy soils permit water to distribute laterally to a limited degree only; this can also cause overwatering by micro-irrigation systems.

Drip or micro-spray fittings can clog and may require that you filter the water source. Inspect fittings regularly and possibly clean them. Insects and rodents can damage drip tape or tubing.

If you already have an irrigation system, your options for retrofitting to micro-irrigation may be limited. Sometimes low-pressure emitters, such as bubblers, can be adapted to existing sprinkler heads. This may require an attachment at the source to reduce water pressure.

FYN Glossary Box

Leaching: the downward movement of water (and any particles dissolved in it, such as nutrients or pollutants) through soil

Photo by: UF/IFAS

Sprinkler water misdirected toward the pavement is more likely to run off the impervious surface and be wasted.
Water-Wise Advice

Get practical advice on state-of-the-art irrigation systems from several sources:

- The water management districts (http://www.dep.state.fl.us/secretary/watman/) and Florida Irrigation Society (http://www.fisstate.org/) provide information on irrigation system selection, maintenance and appropriate watering practices.

- If you are changing areas of your landscape from turf to trees or planted beds, consult with your county’s UF/IFAS Extension office or with the Natural Resources Conservation Service regarding watering options.

- If you are in the market for a new irrigation system, find a reputable certified irrigation contractor who has experience with these systems.

- A free inspection of irrigation system efficiency is available in some areas through the Natural Resources Conservation Service and water management districts’ Mobile Irrigation Labs. For contact information in the south Florida area, please visit: http://www.sfwmd.gov/images/pdfs/splash/spl_mobile_irrig.pdf

Recycled Mulch

Search locally for sources of recycled mulch. Sometimes you can even acquire mulch for free! Here are some tips on obtaining recycled mulch products:

- Use mulch that originates in your own landscape, such as leaves, pine needles, grass and shrub clippings.

- Local power companies, municipal solid waste departments and tree services may supply free or low-cost utility mulch and may sometimes deliver bulk quantities. Try to get only mulch from trimming. It is generally more disease-free than mulch from other sources, such as roots.

- Team up with other homeowners and have bulk quantities delivered to your neighborhood.

- Check the phonebook for commercial suppliers of mulch made from recycled materials.

- If you need lots of mulch for a new landscape, place an ad in the local newspaper so suppliers come to you.

Recycled mulch products made from the invasive plant melaleuca are an excellent alternative to cypress mulch. Melaleuca mulch should be made entirely of bark and wood (right) and heat composted to kill any stray seeds (left).
Thick blankets of fine mulch can become matted and may prevent water and air from seeping through, or become like potting soil and may support weed growth. Rake old mulch to break up any matted soil and to refresh the appearance.

Organic mulches may require weeding and replenishment once or twice a year to maintain a total depth of 2”–3”.

Do not use cypress mulch because harvesting from the wild depletes wetlands.

Shell, crushed stone or pebbles can be used as mulch but they won’t contribute to the soil’s nutrient and organic content or water-holding capacity. Limestone and shell both raise soil pH. They also reflect heat, increasing the water needs of plants.

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**Florida Yard Tip:**

**How Much Mulch?**

Bulk quantities of mulch are sold in cubic yard volumes. To calculate the amount of mulch you need, first measure the area to be mulched, in square feet. Next convert the desired depth to a fraction of a foot. For example, 3” divided by 12” equals ¼ ft. or 0.25 ft. Multiply this fraction by the square foot measurement of the area to be covered (.25 feet x 100 square feet = 25 cubic feet). Convert cubic feet to cubic yards by dividing cubic feet by 27 (25/27 = .926). To cover a 100-square-foot area to a depth of 3”, you will need .926 cubic yards of mulch.

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**Florida Yard Tip:**

**Calibrating Irrigation Systems**

Follow these steps to determine how much water your irrigation system is applying:

- Set several similar, flat-bottomed, straight-sided cans (all must be of equal size) in various places within one watering zone. Tuna cans work well for this.
- Pour the water from all containers into one container. Measure the depth of the water to the nearest 1/8”.
- Divide the measurement by the number of containers to determine the average amount of water applied in that zone in 15 minutes.
- In the future, water the area only as long as it takes to apply ½” to ¾” of water.