Make Your Yard More Florida-Friendly with Micro-Irrigation

Of all the components to successful gardening, watering plays one of the biggest parts. Unfortunately, watering can also be a big drain on our natural water resources. So, if you want to have a Florida-friendly yard, it is important that you water wisely.

Watering has come a long way since the days of dragging garden hoses around. One of the biggest developments to the solution of saving time and water is micro-irrigation. Traditionally used for growing commercial vegetables, orchards, and nursery plants, these systems are easy to use and highly adaptable to the home landscape. The only watering task they are not suited for is watering lawns. But for watering flower beds, vegetable gardens, and shrubs, micro-irrigation is much more efficient than a conventional sprinkler irrigation system.

Micro-irrigation delivers water slowly to the plants, allowing better absorption without excessive run-off. It also delivers water more efficiently, watering just the plant’s root zone, not wasting water on the area between the plants.

When installed with a simple battery operated timer, micro-irrigation can provide an even supply of water, avoiding stress on the plants as well as the gardener who has to remember to turn the water on and off. The timer can be programmed according to the plants’ needs, to come on periodically, as infrequently as once a week, or as frequently as every day.

Micro-irrigation also saves an enormous amount of time. Each time you water established plantings, you should apply one-half inch of water. It takes that much to wet the root zone six inches deep. It could take an hour to apply that much water by hand to a small fifteen by fifteen-foot square flower bed. With a micro-irrigation system all you do is turn on a valve or set your timer and walk away.
What stops most people from installing a system is one of two valid points. First, the system means spending money, and second, it sounds complicated. However, these systems are extremely inexpensive to install if you do your own labor. The average cost of a system is between $100.00 and $400.00 dollars. Parts can be purchased from large hardware stores or irrigation distributors.

A micro-irrigation system is also easy to install for the do-it-yourselfer, because the main line does not need to be trenched into the ground as is the case in sprinkler installations. The typical set-up time is between one to four hours to install a system. It will blend nicely with the plants and become unnoticeable over time. Highly adaptable, the system can be easily expanded to irrigate additional plants. Or emitters and lines can be simply removed and plugged if plants are no longer in that area.

A good place to go to view a system and learn the process of installing one is the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension office, 615 Paul Russell Road. All their demonstration gardens are watered with this system. In fact if you come to the free gardens open house, Saturday, April 21, 9:00 a.m., you can see the many flowering plants and the micro-irrigation system. There will also be Master Gardener volunteers on hand to answer questions about both.

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