



What To Do During A Drought

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Don't mow. Turf already under drought stress will be even more stressed if mowed. The leaves of the grass support the root system. The shorter the grass is mowed, the shorter the root system. If you must mow, mow at the very highest setting and make sure the blades are very sharp. A clean cut will lose less water than a ragged cut.

Don't fertilize. Fertilizing will increase the plants need for water. Fertilizer will also promote new growth which is tender and cannot withstand drought.

Do water deeply. Apply $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of water to the landscape. This amount of water will penetrate about 8-12 inches deep in the soil. When plants are watered deeply they develop a deep root system that is better able to withstand drought. Look for signs of wilt before watering again.

Do use mulch. Mulch helps to prevent water loss from the soil, decreases runoff, and insulates the soil so it does not get too hot. Using organic mulch (like pine bark or oak leaves) will improve the water and nutrient holding capacity of the soil and will even add nutrients to the soil as it breaks down. Keep mulch away from the stems of plants. Large particle mulch (pine bark) can be put down about 3 inches thick. Mulches that form a mat and don't allow water to percolate through as easily (oak leaves) should be put down about 1 inch thick.

Do remove weeds. Weeds compete with plants for water and nutrients. Hand pull if possible. Herbicides don't work as well when plants are under drought stress and are not actively growing. Mulching will also help to suppress weeds.

Use plants that can tolerate our wet to dry weather extremes. Replace plants that die or require lots of water with drought-tolerant ones. Try using native plants that are suited to Florida's extremes in weather. Many are drought and flood tolerant. Wait for the rainy season before re-planting.

If water use is so restricted that landscape plant survival is in question, here are some drastic measures that can be done to save plants:

- Water plants only when they start to wilt.
- Use mulch.
- Prune plants severely to reduce leaf area (if a freeze is possible, wait until after the last freeze).
- Remove weak plants.
- Thin dense beds of plants to reduce competition among plants, pull out weeds.
- For Bahia grass lawns, stop watering and allow the grass to go dormant. Bahia grass will turn brown, but will recover well once the rains resume.