

# Lawn and garden stewardship tips for Florida landscapes

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## All the time

**Read and follow directions.** Before applying fertilizer, take a few minutes to read and follow directions to ensure optimal results and avoid over-application.

**Keep fertilizer on the lawn.** Use a spreader with a side guard deflector to apply fertilizer on the grass and keep it off sidewalks/driveways and out of storm drains.

**Sweep up spills.** Sweep up any leaves, grass clippings or fertilizer off of driveways/sidewalks and back onto the grass to help keep nutrients where they are needed and out of waterways.

**Protect storm drains.** Storm sewers often lead directly into streams and lakes. Always keep yard clippings or pet waste away from sewers or water resources like rivers, lakes, and streams.

**Don't forget pollinators.** Beneficial pollinators, especially bees and butterflies, are in distress, but your backyard can provide a space for them to thrive. Choose a variety of plants to ensure a continuous bloom cycle. Don't forget to provide a water source, such as a bird bath.



## January to March

**Fertilize at the right time.** The best time to feed your Florida lawn is in spring and summer months when the grass is actively growing both shoots and roots. Time your first feeding to when your lawn is actively growing, about the time of your first mowing. To build a nice quality lawn it is recommended to feed at least once in the spring and again in early summer. Be sure to avoid applying during blackout dates—check and follow any local fertilizer ordinances.

**Use compost.** Add compost or garden soil to planting beds and replace soil in containers.

**Plant for pollinators.** As you replace cool-season vegetables and flowers in your garden with hot-season vegetables (peppers, tomatoes, etc.), don't forget beneficial insects like bees and butterflies. Include a border of pollinator-friendly flowers.

**Mulch to save water.** Mulch garden beds to help keep weed seeds from germinating and retain moisture; this helps you use less water outdoors.

**Create buffer zones.** If your lawn borders water, keep fertilizer away from the water's edge. Create a buffer zone with uncut grass or other vegetation (such as native grasses and flowers) to protect against soil erosion and runoff.

**Upgrade to a smart timer.** New types of smart irrigation controllers now exist and can provide significant water savings on your water bill. These new controllers automate watering by measuring weather conditions and accurately assessing the true needs of grass vs. the older clock-based timers which lack the ability to actively assess those changing needs. Using this type of controller can lessen the likelihood of fertilizer runoff due to overwatering.

**Check your sprinkler heads.** Regularly inspect your sprinkler heads to make sure they are not damaged or malfunctioning. Adjust sprinklers so they are not spraying water on paved surfaces such as the sidewalk or driveway.

## April to August

**Monitor your watering.** Florida's weather is unique. Some years are hot and dry, while others are wet. If you are not using a weather-based irrigation controller, check the settings and adjust based on your local weather. Florida lawns need 1 to 1.5 inches of water per week, whether from rainfall or irrigation.

**Enhance your watering.** Look for summer products with surfactants/wetting agents as these work by improving your soil's ability to evenly wet and retain moisture; this helps you use less water outdoors.

**Mow high to grow deep.** Set your mower at its higher settings and your roots will thrive, grow deeper and reach more water and nutrients. Taller grass with its deeper roots better withstand traffic, heat and drought.

**Garden for the heat.** Add flowers (salvia, wax begonia, coleus, ornamental pepper, vinca), vegetables (Malabar spinach, okra, Southern pea, sweet potato) and herbs (basil, Mexican tarragon, rosemary) to the garden that can handle the extreme summer heat.

**Repel mosquitos naturally.** Add herbs (chives, dill, rosemary, lemon balm, lemon grass) and flowers (lavender, nasturtiums, marigolds, petunias) to your landscape that naturally repel mosquitoes and other garden pests.

**Mulch to save water.** Freshen up mulch in garden beds after planting summer plants to help keep weed seeds from germinating and retain moisture; this helps you use less water outdoors.

**Check your trees.** Ahead of hurricane season, check your trees for damaged or weak branches. Remove debris to ensure it does not get swept into storm drains or canals.



## September to December

**Mulch those tree leaves.** Like grass clippings, leaves can be mulched right back into your lawn where they will break down and enrich the soil by adding nutrients and organic matter. You can also add fallen leaves to a compost pile.

**Fertilize at the right time.** When feeding Florida lawns in the fall it is best to err on the early side of this season. This allows your lawn time to benefit from the nutrition before it slows down going into winter. To gain the most from a fall feeding in Florida, try to time this application near Labor Day. Be sure to avoid applying during blackout dates--check and follow any local fertilizer ordinances.

**Clean up garden beds.** Remove dead plants, cut back ornamental grasses and perennials, and prune roses.

**Plant a cool season garden.** Plant cool-season flowers (dianthus, pansy, viola, snapdragon, petunia), herbs (parsley, cilantro, chives, garlic, sage), vegetables (broccoli, kale, lettuce, carrots, strawberries), and bulbs (agapanthus, lilies, amaryllis).

**Put compost to work.** Add compost or garden soil to planting beds and replace soil in containers before planting cool-season plants.

**Protect tender plants.** Protect less-hardy plants from cold temperatures and freeze or frost by covering them or bringing them indoors.

**Feed citrus.** The right time to feed lemon, orange, or lime trees in your backyard is the winter months of December or January. Select a plant food with a nutrient mix specially designed for citrus.

