New Year resolutions to improve your landscape

This is the time of year when we look towards the future for personal improvement and goal setting. The backyard gardener should be no different. The New Year is a great time to make some resolutions that will benefit your landscape.

This year, plan to be extra-good to the environment with this handy list of achievable resolutions.

**Install a rain barrel**
Rainwater harvesting is always beneficial, whether the water is used to water one houseplant or an entire garden. Also, the act of collecting rainwater can be an inspiration to find other ways to conserve water around the home. It’s a great way to save water and money on your water bill.

**Check your irrigation system**
Did you know that the typical homeowner uses up to 50% of a home’s total water consumption for irrigation, often over-irrigating?

If you have a 5,000 square-foot yard and use an in-ground sprinkler system, you may be spending $5 to $25 every time you irrigate. Overwatering the lawn and landscape is a common mistake many homeowners make.

Be sure that you are not unknowingly wasting water by running a faulty irrigation system.
- Check for broken or leaking sprinkler heads.
- Redirect sprinklers that are obstructed by plant parts or grass blades.
- Don’t mix sprinkler types. For example, having spray heads and rotors in the same zone. These two sprinkler types have different application rates, and each is generally intended to irrigate different types of plants. When stationary shrub spray heads and rotating turf sprinklers are used in the same irrigation zone, the shrubs usually end up being overwatered.
- Schedule waterings according to plant needs. Irrigation controllers are often set to run too frequently or for too long per irrigation event. Consequently, turfgrass and landscape plants are over-irrigated,
water is wasted, fertilizers are washed away, and diseases are promoted. Water only as needed.

- Be sure to calibrate your irrigation system to determine how long to run the system so that it delivers the amount of water recommended for your area. Irrigation systems can be very different and could be delivering too much, not enough, or just the right amount of water, depending on the type of irrigation system and the zone being watered.

Free compost
Converting yard debris to compost has many benefits. It is an environmentally friendly way to reduce the amount of solid waste that must be disposed of, and it provides useful and beneficial products for yards and gardens. Compost is an excellent soil amendment that improves the health and structure of both sandy and clay soils. It can be applied on top of soil as mulch. Mixed with other components, it makes a good potting soil and some gardeners brew it in water to make a compost “tea” for plants.

Reduce pesticide usage
Learn how to avoid pesticide usage by following proper cultural techniques. And, when pests do show up, learn how to use the most environmentally friendly techniques to manage them. Not sure where to start? Just contact your local Cooperative Extension Service when you have a problem or question. We are here to serve you.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

For additional information on County Extension Services and other articles of interest go to http://santarosa.ifas.ufl.edu.

###