

# SUNNYGROVE LANDSCAPING AND NURSERY, INC.

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## Landscape Maintenance Guide

After landscaping is installed, a regular maintenance program is essential to keep the landscape healthy, looking good and growing properly. The following guide is to assist in this goal.

### 1. FERTILIZATION

Fertilization of landscape plantings, such as Trees, Shrubs, Vines and Groundcovers, should be an 8-4-8, acid based fertilizer with 50% organic and should contain trace (minor) elements. Fertilizer application as follows:

- ◇ **Annual Bedding Plants:**  
Apply 1-1/2 pounds per 100 square feet before planting and top dress every three to six weeks as needed with liquid 20-20-20. One pound of fertilizer usually equals 3 cups.
- ◇ **Small Shrubs and Ground Covers:**  
Apply ½ pound per plant, well scattered around the drip line of the plant.
- ◇ **Medium Shrubs:**  
Apply ½ pound per plant, well scattered around the drip line.
- ◇ **Large Shrubs:**  
Apply ½ - 1 pound per plant. Distribution of the fertilizer should be in the area halfway between the stem and drip line out to an equal distance beyond the drip line of the plant.
- ◇ **Trees:**  
Measure the diameter of the tree trunk two feet above the ground and apply one pound of fertilizer per caliper inch of diameter for trees of six inches of diameter and less. For trees with diameter of six inches and more, apply 1½ pounds of fertilizer per inch. This fertilizer should be deep root applied, using a 2" spud bar driven into the ground 15-18" deep. These holes should be ± 2-3' from the trunk in a circle around the Palm. The hole should then be filled with fertilizer. Any remaining fertilizer can then be topped dressed around the Tree.

Fertilization of Palms and Lawn Grass differ from general plantings and should be handled accordingly:

- ◇ **Palms:**  
Apply a 10-5-10 analysis fertilizer with a 50% organic nitrogen content and trace elements, especially Mn-Manganese, Mg-Magnesium, at a rate of 1-2 pounds per square caliper inch of trunk. This fertilizer should be deep root applied, using a 2" spud bar driven into the ground 15-18" deep. These holes should be ± 2-3' from the trunk in a circle around the Palm. The hole should then be filled with fertilizer. Any remaining fertilizer can then be topped dressed around the Palm.

- ◇ **Turf:**  
Areas should be fertilized with 16-4-8 analysis fertilizer, with trace (minor) elements and have a high sulfur content. Also be sure that the fertilizer is derived from mainly sulfates and few if any murates.

## **NOTES ON FERTILIZATION:**

When applying fertilizer it is easy to burn and damage plants. Fertilizer burn does not just happen from too much fertilizer; it can also happen from incorrect fertilization procedures. Whenever fertilizer is applied, be sure that it is not being applied to dry ground. The soil should be moist and the plants should not be wilting from lack of water. Should these conditions be prevalent, be sure to correct them and then wait 24 - 36 hours before fertilizing. This will ensure proper fertilizer absorption by the plant. Once fertilizer is applied, work thru mulch and water in thoroughly.

When fertilizer is applied to a dry plant and then watered in, the plant is very thirsty and soaks up the first bits of water that it receives, which in this case also contains the greatest concentration of fertilizer. This will burn the plant severely at times. When fertilizer is applied to a plant that is taking up water and moisture at the proper rate, the fertilizer will be absorbed properly. Should you find that fertilizer has been applied to very dry plantings, flush the root areas of the plantings.

As with most of the South West Florida Area the PH of the soil is very high. This condition in the soil causes poor fertilizer absorption. When the Soil PH is high, the fertilizer becomes 'locked up' and unavailable to the plants and trees. No matter how much fertilizer is on the ground and in the soil around the plantings, they may still appear yellowish, or not as healthy and green as expected. The best way to combat this problem is with acidic fertilizer. When purchasing a fertilizer, be sure that it is a complete fertilizer, meaning that it contains all of the trace (minor) elements that plantings require, and that it is derived from mostly sulfates and not from murates. This fertilizer should also contain a sulfur level of 9 + percent. After treating your lawn and plantings accordingly, you still have areas not responding very well to fertilizer, you should contact the extension office and see about having a soil test done to determine what other problems there may be.

## **2. PRUNING**

All pruning should be performed as required to maintain the natural shape and characteristics of the plant variety. Hedge shears should not be used to prune shrubs.

Pruning should include removal of plant material, which is dead, broken, or diseased. When diseased plant material is removed, the cut should be made well into the healthy plant tissue. Pruning should also include the removal of inward growing branches, water suckers, and crossing or rubbing branches. The crossing branch facing inward will generally be selected for removal.

Flowering shrubs generally should not be pruned until after their blooming period. If they are constant bloomers, pruning can be done best in the spring, after their first flush of blooms. Vertical growth should be cut at a 45° angle. Branches should be removed flush to the trunk.

Sabal and/or Queen Palms fronds should be removed as close to the trunk as possible when they are completely brown. Do not remove any green healthy fronds just to make it easier to reach dead fruiting stalks or emerging florescence. Removing green fronds from the palm will rob it of future food for new frond development.

### 3. **MOWING**

The mower height for Floratam Sod is a minimum of 3". It should be mowed frequently enough so as not to remove more than a third of the blade of grass at any one cutting. Excessive cuttings stress the turf and increase water requirements.

### 4. **MULCHING**

Mulching is very important, not only for a finished look in the landscape, but also to slow evaporation and slow the growth of weeds. Two to three inches of organic mulch is preferred. As the mulch discolors or washes out, re-mulching is necessary. The existing mulch needs to be stirred up before new mulch is added. The use of rock as mulch is not generally advised due to the increased evaporation of moisture from the soil. Rocks can be used for slowing runoff or accenting an area.

### 5. **FROST**

If a frost warning is issued or extreme cold temperatures (32 degrees or below) are forecasted, several preventative steps should be taken.

- ◇ Step One: Be sure that all plantings are well watered the day before the cold weather is forecasted for. Air around the root system of the plant is less insulating than water. Water will provide an adequate insulation, and should the temperatures dip way below freezing, the water around the root system will freeze and insulate the plant at no lower than 32 degrees.
- ◇ Step Two: Cover the plants the evening of the forecasted weather and uncover them the following morning after the temperature has risen above 32 degrees.  
**Turn Irrigation Clock off during freeze.**

Some die back can still be expected, but leave any damaged material until threatening weather is over. Do not use plastic to cover plantings. Use frost cloth, sheets, or light blankets, etc. Do not use irrigation to wash the frost off uncovered plants.

### 6. **WATER, IRRIGATION, SPRINKLERS**

An automatic irrigation sprinkler system is recommended on all planted and sodded areas. Turf generally requires 1-1-1/2" of water per week. Once shrubs are established (six to twelve weeks), they require less water and should be watered less often. So, when

Mother Nature provides rain during the rainy season, the irrigation system can be turned down and watering can be done less frequently, on an "as needed" basis.

The irrigation system needs to be monitored frequently to re-adjust misguided spray or broken heads.

Timers should be set to water in the early mornings and every three or four days. A good soaking every three or four days forces the plant to produce a deep root system. Over watering not only wastes water, but also leached the fertilizer down below the feeder roots and this wastes fertilizer.

The existing natural vegetation that is incorporated into the overall design of the landscaping needs to be considered when the irrigation plan is done. Naturally vegetated areas generally do not need any supplemental watering and it may even be harmful if these areas are irrigated.

Suggested zone times - Rotors 30-45 minutes, Mist 15-20 minutes. These times should vary according to the specific areas taking into consideration the drainage.

Depending on which model is installed, your irrigation clock may have a 9-volt battery back up. This battery is intended to keep the program from being erased during short power outages. It does not have the capability of actually running your irrigation system during a power outage. If your time clock is unplugged for any extended period of time or you experience an extended power outage, you should check and/or replace the battery and make sure the program is set. Refer to your owner's manual and/or directions on the inside of the time clock door.

As a standard practice, batteries in timers should be replaced twice annually. Rain sensors should be checked 3-4 times annually.

## **7. STAKING AND GUYING OF PALMS AND SHADE TREES**

We recommend that stakes remain on palm trees for one year.

## **IRRIGATION MAINTENANCE**

Twice monthly, turn on each zone and visually check each head to make sure it is spraying correctly. Weed eaters, edgers, and lawn mowers can damage heads, and should be repaired before the surrounding plant material suffers. If a head is barely spraying or not spraying at all, the filter is probably clogged. Unscrew the nozzle, remove, and clean the filter under running water. Before the filter is replaced, flush the line by turning your system on for a few seconds. If your water source is city water, clogged heads will be a rarity. If your water source is from a well, lake or effluent line, you should check for clogged heads weekly. Any time you notice brown spots in sod or wilting plant material, you should check the zone for possible damaged or clogged heads.

Replace the battery in your irrigation controller twice a year. We suggest spring and fall when we change with daylight savings time. Inspect your controller frequently for ant's nests. They like the dry, dark area behind the faceplate and can short out your clock. Never spray ant killer into the clock. Treat the ground at the base of the clock with pesticide. Mothballs can be placed behind the faceplate to help repel insects.

Most plant material will require pruning to keep its shape. Plants that are allowed to grow wild will eventually block the spray pattern of irrigation heads. All irrigation designs will need adjustment as plants mature. Heads will need to be raised or moved as needed. Sod should be cleared around heads with roundup or clippers. Floratam sod is aggressive enough that it can completely cover heads if not maintained.

If your controller is plugged into a GFI outlet, make sure the breaker has not been tripped after power outages.