

Mobile Irrigation Lab in Highlands County

Water conservation has become a vital part of our world in these present days. Population numbers combined with years of drought are taxing our limited water supplies. Fortunately, there are many people and agencies that are concerned about this ever increasing challenge and they are doing something positive. Southwest Florida Water Management District, the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District and the University of Florida/IFAS/Extension have provided funding for the first mobile irrigation laboratory in Highlands County. This lab is made up of professionals, staff and volunteers that have joined together to help homeowners conserve water.

Evaluations for the Mobile Irrigation Lab (MIL) for the Highlands Soil & Water Conservation District started on June 22nd. This free service offered to homeowners within the City of Sebring is basically a lab on wheels. Irrigation experts, including a Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor from Masuen Consulting, LLC, Master Gardeners, and staff from Highlands County's Extension/ UF IFAS and Highlands Soil & Water Conservation District /Natural Resources Department visit homes and evaluate the landscape and irrigation system.

Once the area has been evaluated, specific recommendations are made to the homeowner to cut any water waste while improving the beauty and health of the lawn. The homeowner makes the improvements when and if they choose. The MIL doesn't change the irrigation system or make any repairs. It is simply a program to assist homeowners in making good decisions about water conservation.

The benefits of the MIL to homeowners are on site consultation, specific recommendations for the property, lower utility bills if advice is followed, water savings, reduced runoff, and reduction of plant diseases, weeds, and overgrowth from excessive watering. In addition, the Master Gardeners and Highlands County Extension/ IFAS staff makes recommendations to the homeowners about the right plant for the right place using Florida Friendly and native vegetation.

All of the MIL participants are knowledgeable about Southwest Florida Water Management District guidelines and rules. The MIL service reduces environmental impact and there is absolutely no charge to the homeowner.

Once the MIL folks arrive at the site, they check the irrigation timer to see if the watering is set for the correct day, time and zone run times. They will ensure that the homeowner has a rain sensor or shut off switch; if not, one will be supplied and installed at no charge to the homeowner. They also check for overspray on walks, streets and buildings. Leaks, broken parts, mismatched sprinklers, blocked spray patterns and micro-irrigation will all be evaluated. Visits also include an assessment of any soil and drainage problems.

The Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District, Southwest Florida Water Management District, Highlands County Extension Service, University of Florida (IFAS), Highlands County Board of County Commissioners, Master Gardeners, Natural Resources Conservation Service's Earth Team Volunteers and Masuen Consulting, LLC have formed a partnership to serve the

citizens of Highlands County with the best information and educational programming available regarding urban irrigation. After a visit from the MIL, the homeowner will be able to conserve water by solving irrigation problems, capitalize on opportunities, and enhance the quality of their lives regarding water conservation.

At the present time, we are looking for three more sites to visit. The homes must be within the City of Sebring boundaries and have a metered irrigation system. If your residence fits this description and you are interested in conserving water and saving money – give us a call at 402-6540 or 402-6545 to set up an appointment.