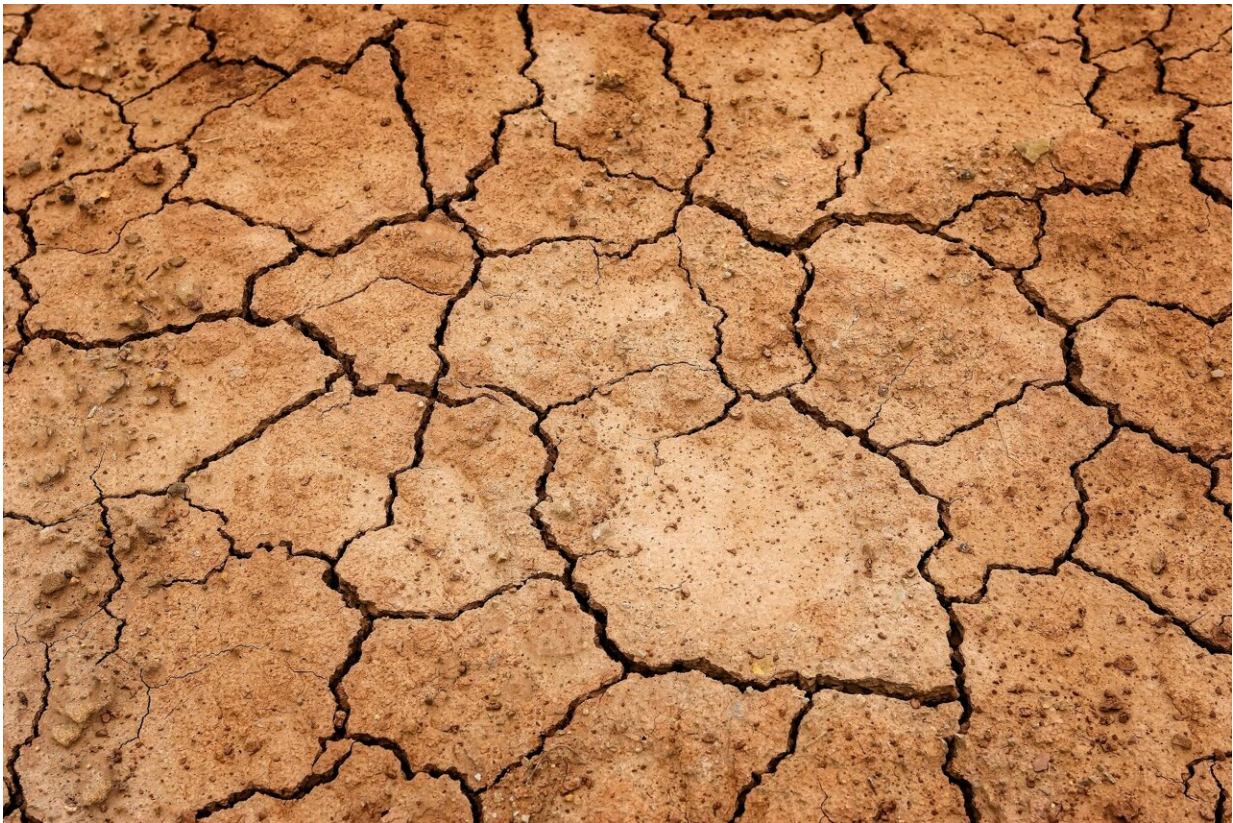


Florida's brutal drought worsens; Orlando has hottest start to year on record

April 6 2023, by Kevin Spear



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

With less than 2 inches of rain this year, Orlando is enduring its second driest stretch from Jan. 1 to April 5 since the late 1800s and also its hottest on record for that period.

The city, Central Florida and much of the state's peninsula are experiencing a widening severe [drought](#), according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, a collaboration of universities and federal environmental agencies.

"When was the last time it rained?" said Fran Boettcher, a master gardener at the Orange County and University of Florida agricultural extension center. "Who can remember?"

In Orlando, the last measurable rain was 25 days ago, when just .15 inches barely wetted the ground, boosting the year's rain to 1.89 inches, or about as much as a single, typical summer downpour can bring.

The Drought Monitor is updated weekly on Thursday mornings. The newest report shows 55% of Florida under severe drought now, up from 20% at the start of this year and less than 1% last year at this time.

Typically, April is a tough month for lawns and landscaping, as spring brings hotter weather but not much rain. On average, the dry season transitions to the [rainy season](#) in Orlando on May 27, or five days before the Atlantic hurricane season begins.

Derrick Weitlich, a lead meteorologist and climate program leader at the National Weather Service in Central Florida, said precipitation across the region so far in 2023 has ranged from 1 to 4 inches, which is as much as 6 inches below normal.

He said crops and pastures are wilting, wildfire danger is on the rise and groundwater levels are receding.

The long-range outlook, according to the U.S. Climate Prediction Center, is for rainfall to get back on track by the end of June.

But, with global heating stirring the climate pot, weather has been wickedly fickle during the past half-year.

Hurricane Ian brought [widespread flooding](#) and record rainfall to Central Florida in late September.

By early October, the Florida peninsula was entirely drought free, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, while much of the West and especially California were dealing with brutally dry conditions.

With historic amounts of rain and snow this year in California and unrelenting drying out across Florida's peninsula, the drought map has reversed.

California now has almost no [severe drought](#) and nearly all of Florida's peninsula is swaddled in it.

The Drought Monitor Thursday cited reports in Central Florida of "numerous impacts of very dry conditions in the region including water holes drying up and areas experiencing extremely poor pasture conditions with supplemental feeding necessary to maintain livestock."

For Central Florida residents watching their lawns broil into brown, Boettcher, the master gardener, suggested it might be time to consider switching to Florida [native plants](#) that can shrug off dry spells a lot better than thirsty grass.

"Lawns need a lot of water, fertilizer and pest control," Boettcher said. "That's a lot of time and a lot of pocket book."

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