



For immediate release

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Xeriscaping: Landscaping that Saves Time and Cost

Having an attractive well-manicured yard that doesn't use a lot of water does not mean you have to have a desert setting yard with cacti and rock gardens. In fact, you can have a well-rounded yard with healthy plants and grasses that tolerate Atlanta's summer heat and dry conditions. The Clean Water Campaign, in partnership with local governments, and the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service will be hosting Xeriscaping workshops to share ways to have attractive landscape without creating extra demands on water supplies or the environment.

The term Xeriscape refers to an innovative landscaping practice that conserves water and protects the environment. Pronounced "zera-scape," the practice was created 1981 in response to a prolonged drought in the United States. It derives from the Greek word "Xeros," meaning "dry." Xeriscape is an approach to landscaping using appropriate design, soil preparation, irrigation, plant selection, mulching and maintenance. Xeriscape uses native or adapted plants that are more pest resistant and require less fertilizer or pesticides.

Last year, water-saving landscaping practices became even more important in the Atlanta region when the Georgia Environmental Protection Division instituted a permanent outdoor watering schedule. The schedule limits outdoor water use year-round, even during non-drought periods. Odd-numbered addresses can water on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. Even-numbered addresses can water on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. No watering is allowed on Fridays. Cindy Daniel with the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District says, "Even in a wet year like this one, it's important to remember watering restrictions. They are not just for drought anymore." She added, "Watering restrictions help to relieve pressure demands on the water systems during peak hours as well as raise awareness of water use."

A common misconception about water restrictions is that nice, attractive lawns would be sacrificed. Xeriscaped landscapes prove otherwise. Xeriscaped yards can reduce outdoor water consumption by as much as 50 percent without taking away the quality and beauty of your home environment. Daniel said, "In the metropolitan District, the average household uses 20% of their water outside. This water goes mostly to outdoor lawn watering, but also includes car washing, outdoor cleaning and pool filling. Most counties charge higher fees for this extra use during the hot summer months when demands on their systems are already high. Xeriscaping helps you to really reduce your outdoor use and it probably will make a big difference in your water bill." Many commercial properties across the region have been awarded high honors for their Xeriscape landscapes because of the color, appearance and other aesthetic qualities. Daniel said, "Xeriscaping is an easy way to save money and energy. Why go to the extra trouble and expense to water your landscape if you don't have to?"

Any landscape, whether newly installed or well established, can be made more water efficient by implementing one or all of the seven steps of Xeriscaping. (1) *Planning and Design*, (2) *Soil Analysis*, (3) *Appropriate Plant Selection*, (4) *Practical Turf Areas*, (5) *Efficient Irrigation*, (6) *Use of Mulches* and (7) *Appropriate Maintenance*. Existing landscapes do not have to be completely redesigned, but can be retrofitted to save water. Significant water savings can be achieved by modifying your watering schedule, learning how and when to water, and about the different water needs of plants in your landscape.

Step 1: You might be surprised to know that you may already be implementing some of these practices. Planning includes identifying three water-use requirement zones. Group plants and turf with similar water needs in the same zone. Low use zones require little or no supplemental water after establishment. Moderate use zones require some supplemental water during dry periods. High use zones require limited areas where full water requirements are easily met. The "high use" zone should be the most visible area of the landscape, such as an entranceway or patio area.

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Step 2: Testing your soil's nutrient level is key to having a "green" yard. You will know what type of fertilizer to purchase and what soil amendments to add. The analysis will help you understand what is needed to encourage a strong healthy root system. Strong roots help plants absorb moisture and survive drought.

Step 3: If you are just beginning to add plants to your landscape, identifying the appropriate plants may be overwhelming. Place plants with high water requirements in areas that stay moist naturally, and low-water using plants in drier areas. There are natives, non-natives, hybrids and many other types of plants. Choosing an adaptive plant will help to lower the cost of constantly replacing trees, shrubs or flowers that are not suitable for the yard. Native plants not only survive the extreme conditions of our climate, but also prevent water pollution by not requiring additional fertilizer and pesticide.

Step 4: Practical Turf Areas include small areas near the home entrance, recreation areas, a blanket of turf on a highly erodible soil. Design turf areas in practical shapes that can be mowed and irrigated easily. Avoid sharp angles and long narrow strips.

Step 5: Efficient irrigation minimizes the need for watering. Zone irrigation systems to water plants with different needs separately. Select the appropriate type of irrigation. Hand watering is effective for watering plants that show signs of stress. Drip irrigation systems and automatic controllers that detect rainfall and turn off the irrigation system, are good examples.

Step 6: Mulches conserve water by absorbing the water and preventing moisture from escaping through evaporation. Appropriate mulches that are applied correctly will extend the intervals between planting. The best mulches to retain moisture are pine straw, pine bark mini-nuggets and shredded hardwood mulch, or chips. Applying mulch appropriately is important as well. Plant the trees, plants and shrubs appropriately and then add mulch to retain moisture. Avoid applying too much mulch because it encourages shallow tree roots, which are easily damaged by excessive cold, heat or drought (source: UGA).

Step 7: An established turf area generally needs only 1" of water once every 7 to 10 days. Excessive watering encourages shallow root growth, causing grass to lose its ability to survive drought and low rainfall.

Learn more about the seven steps of Xeriscaping at one of the Clean Water Campaign's Xeriscape workshops this August. Speakers from local offices of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service will provide expert information and advice on Xeriscaping and native plants. Registered attendees will receive a copy of *Xeriscape: a Guide to Developing a Water-wise Landscape*. Register online at www.cleanwatercampaign.com or call the county contacts listed below for more information.

- **August 16, 2005 (7:00 PM)** - North Fulton Service Center, 7741 Roswell Road, Atlanta, GA 30350. Speaker: Lynwood Blackmon. Contact: Corlette Dennard at 404-730-8097
- **August 18, 2005 (7:00 PM)** - Cobb County Water Quality Lab Training Room, 662 South Cobb Drive, Marietta, GA 30060-3105. Speaker: Steve Brady. Contact: Jennifer McCoy at 770-528-1482
- **August 18, 2005 (7:00 PM)** - Gwinnett County Justice and Administration Center, 75 Langley Drive, Lawrenceville, GA 30045. Speaker: Robert Brannon. Contact: Kelley O'Brien 404-463-3259
- **August 30, 2005 (7:00 PM)** - South Fulton Service Center, 5600 Stonewall Tell Road, College Park, GA 30349. Speaker: Lynwood Blackmon. Contact: Corlette Dennard at 404-730-8097

*The **Clean Water Campaign** is a cooperative, multi-agency public education initiative spearheaded by local governments in metro Atlanta, supported by the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District and managed by the Atlanta Regional Commission. Its mission is to build awareness of water quality problems and solutions in the Atlanta region. For more information about the Clean Water Campaign, contact Kelley O'Brien at 404-463-3259.*