



For immediate release

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Testing Your Landscape: How Water Efficient Is It?

The fresh and rejuvenated look of a landscape during the springtime maybe difficult to emulate year round, but maintaining a healthy landscape that can withstand possible drought conditions can be done in as little time as a Saturday morning.

A planned landscape can be designed to thrive during limited watering while saving money and effort. To design and plan a landscape, a redesign is not necessary. Think of the permanent features of your landscape including a house, other buildings, rocks, slopes, existing trees and vegetation you would like to keep. What are the landscape characteristics, such as sun exposure, existing shade, slopes, soil types and drainage issues?

Identify the uses of your landscape and that will help to direct the design. Then divide your landscape into three zones: low, moderate and high. A low use requires little or no water after establishment and are usually functional areas (sides of the house, driveway and garage) are the least visible and need the least amount of watering. Moderate requires some supplemental water during dry periods and are sunlit areas that require more water, keep these zones small to highly visible or recreational. High-use zones are limited areas where full water requirements are easily met. The "high" zone should be the most visible area of the landscape such as an entranceway or patio area. Don't forget shade areas in your landscape, they can be beneficial and can cool the landscape as much as 20 degrees reducing heat buildup and water evaporation from the soil. (Did you know? A mature oak can dissipate as much heat as four central air conditioners running 24 hours per day.)

Test your soil- think of knowing your soil type like your blood type. Test your soil by taking spoonfuls from eight different areas of your yard and bag them up for your local University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service agent. Pay a small fee and within a few weeks, you will receive a full report on your soil to know what is needed to encourage a strong, healthy root system. Strong roots absorb moisture and survive drought.

Can your soil hold water? Dig a 12" to 15" hole. Fill the hole with water to see how fast it drains. If the water remains in the hole more than 12 hours, the soil is poorly drained. Improvements that can be made to the soil will vary based upon the structure.

There are many ways to make your landscape more water efficient such as the selection of proper plants, mulching, and select the proper type of irrigation. Identifying appropriate plants that can withstand drought such as crape myrtle and juniper, they grow on very dry sites. Identify "practical turf" areas in simple shapes that can be mowed and irrigated easily. Use efficient irrigation (and use a rain sensor shutoff switch that cuts off when rain is detected). Use a turf that will remain healthy but may brown or wilt during drought and will regain color when it receives adequate water. Use efficient irrigation for zone areas that require water use. Select the appropriate type of irrigation. Trees and shrubs in the low water-use zones need supplemental watering to establish roots. Use mulch to conserve moisture and prevent evaporation and maintaining even moisture. The best mulches to retain moisture are pine straw, pine-bark mini-nuggets and shredded hardwood mulch or chips. Fine-textured mulches hold moisture better than coarse- textured mulches. Rock, gravel and marble are not as effective, since they absorb and re-radiate heat, increasing water loss. Appropriate maintenance is also a key factor to keeping your landscape efficient and healthy. Generally, a turf area needs only 1" of water once every 7 to 10 days. Over watering promotes shallow root growth.

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April is Water Efficient Landscape Month and to celebrate the Clean Water Campaign in partnership with the Fulton County University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Office will be hosting a Water Efficient Landscaping workshop on **April 20** at 6:30 p.m. at the North Service Center, 7741 Roswell Road, Atlanta, GA 30350. Attendees will also learn proper plant selection, effective mulching techniques and ways to create an award winning landscape that reduces the cost and effort of maintaining it. Registration for the **free** workshop is required. Register online at www.cleanwatercampaign.com or call 404-463-3259.

*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.*

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