

## WHY XERISCAPING MAKES GOOD SENSE

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Metro Atlanta is rapidly reaching the limits of its existing water resources. This is the result of not only an increase in population, but also an increase in the extent of landscaping. More homes, apartments, businesses and industries are installing water consuming landscapes. The increasing trend has been observed over the past 10 years and is reflected by an increase in peaking factors (ratio of maximum day water demand to annual average demand).

On hot, dry summer days there is as much water used outside as inside. Not only are more landscapes being installed, but too much water is wasted as a result of over-irrigation. Reports indicate that many people overwater their yards by 20 to 40 percent. A Cobb County Extension agent reported that he observed more root rot this summer than ever before even though Metro Atlanta was under severe outdoor watering restrictions.

There is a creative way to reduce outdoor use without sacrificing aesthetics or reducing the number of landscapes. This can be accomplished by applying Xeriscape principles. A 12-minute, professionally produced video will be shown as part of the presentation to explain these principles. In summary, these principles consist of: (1) proper planning and design, (2) limited turf areas, (3) irrigate efficiently, (4) improve soil conditions, (5) use mulches, (6) use water thrifty plants, and (7) maintain landscape properly.

Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority applied Xeriscape principles to its new administration office building which resulted in a significant water savings over a conventional landscape design plan. This was accomplished without changing aesthetics of the project.

There are many benefits that result from an application of Xeriscape principles. First and foremost is a reduction in outdoor water use and therefore an overall reduction in water consumption. This will extend the life of our limited water supply and delay expensive expansions of existing water treatment plants. Also, more efficient operation of treatment plants will occur as power costs are lowered and more uniform plant flows are maintained year-round. From a recent study by Brown and Caldwell Consulting Engineers, the cost to "create" water by promoting water conservation (e.g., through Xeriscaping) is 1/20th the cost of purchasing additional water from Lakes Lanier or Allatoona and expanding treatment plants accordingly.

A second major benefit of Xeriscaping is to property owners since time and cost of landscape maintenance is significantly reduced. This is clearly demonstrated in light of life cycle costs. On this basis, 1 to 2 percent of the landscape costs is for design, 3 to 5 percent is for installation, and approximately 95 percent is for maintenance. A Xeri-

scape design reduces turfed areas, manicured hedges, etc., thereby reducing maintenance costs. Post Properties and others have applied these principles for years to reduce maintenance, without knowing they were using Xeriscape principles. Greenhouse businesses also benefit from the application of Xeriscape principles. This is due to the fact that Xeriscaped designs require more plants and mulching and less turf which has greater profit to the growers. Hence, Xeriscape makes good sense to everyone involved.