



OUTDOOR WATERING – DOING MORE WITH LESS

The Georgia Drought Management Plan, effective March 26, 2003, calls for year-round outdoor water conservation practices whether we are in times of drought or not. On May 26, 2004, the Board of Natural Resources (DNR) adopted Rules for Outdoor Water Use (Chapter 391-3-30) that set a permanent outdoor water schedule in Georgia. Several local governments have decided to keep more restrictive schedules in place. We offer this brochure to explain why outdoor water conservation makes sense.

Reasons Why?

Water is a limited resource that needs to be used wisely. Outdoor water use can account for up to 50 % of total water use for a home during the summer months. Homes with automated irrigation systems are more likely to overuse outdoor water. Outdoor irrigation use can easily be reduced by applying water only when and where it is needed.

Over irrigation can damage plants or make plants unhealthy. In Georgia, the average rainfall is 54 inches a year. Often no supplemental watering is necessary to maintain a landscape. Supplemental irrigation is typically needed only when installing plants and in the summer on annuals that can dry up in the heat. Over-watered plants are more susceptible to disease and pest infestations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are we implementing outdoor watering restrictions if there is no drought?

In Georgia, the DNR is charged with managing water as a shared resource for the public good. Instituting outdoor water use policy during non-drought periods will make water conservation behavior a part of Georgia culture and allow for reasonable water use during periods of drought.

Many times, enough outdoor water is provided by rain. During dry periods, watering deeply 3 days a week is sufficient to maintain a landscape. The University of Georgia College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences drought web site states: **"If citizens would learn about the water needs of plants and implement water-efficient landscape practices, outdoor water use could be decreased by 50 percent or more without sacrificing quality or beauty of the outdoor environment."**

See www.georgiadrought.org.

Outdoor watering restrictions:

- Smooth out peak demands.
- Reduce the incidence for low water pressure in distribution systems.
- Postpone the need for capital investments to address peaks.
- Leave more water in the streams and aquifers.
- Postpone or eliminate the need for expanding existing water sources.
- Help local governments meet water demands and reduce the cost of production.

How do State regulations differ from local restrictions?

Local restrictions can be the same as or stricter than State restrictions, but not less strict. It is important that you check with your local water utility provider to know what your local restrictions are.

Will these outdoor restrictions reduce water revenues?

This depends on your water rate structure. Yes, if there are outdoor water users who over-water now, and you don't have an inclining block or summer surcharge rate structure in place.

What You Can Do

Maintain three to five inches of mulch on your landscape. Mulch holds moisture in the soil and prevents evaporation from the soil surface. Fine-textured mulches, such as pine straw, mini-nuggets and shredded hardwood mulch do a better job of conserving moisture than coarse-textured mulch. Apply mulch to as large an area as possible under the plant. Remember the roots of established woody ornamentals extend two to three times the canopy spread. Consider placing two to three sheets of newspaper under mulch. Pull back existing mulch with a leaf rake, moisten the paper and rake back the mulch over the newspaper. This practice will help retain moisture.

Use a hand-held hose to apply water only to those plants that show signs of wilt. Priority should be given to newly planted trees and shrubs (those installed within the past four months). Water these plants every seven to 10 days during the absence of rainfall.

Avoid shallow watering. The worst thing you can do for plants is to water them frequently and shallowly. Shallow frequent watering encourages a weak root system and reduces the drought tolerance of plants.

Direct water to the roots - not the leaves. Avoid wetting the foliage of ornamental plants if possible. Wetting the foliage encourages diseases and results in evaporative water loss.

Use drip or trickle irrigation or a soaker hose. Drip irrigation uses 50% less water than conventional sprinkler irrigation and applies water slowly and directly to the root system.

Install a timer and a rain sensor on outdoor irrigation systems. A rain sensor detects when rain is falling and turns the irrigation system off and on. Rain sensors are add-on equipment, but are inexpensive and usually re-pay their cost in water savings in a couple of years. If your system does not have a rain sensor, you can purchase one at a local home improvement store. You can install it yourself or have an irrigation contractor install one for you. Place the rain sensor in a location not covered by building eaves and that does not get hit with irrigation water. For homes, a location where there are no trees for interference attached to the roof edge works well.

Let rainfall be the main water source for your landscape whenever possible. The easiest way to make good use of rainfall is to have a rain sensor connected into your control system. Of course, irrigation needs will change from year to year according to how much rainfall occurs. Watering needs also change with the seasons. A good controller will let you adjust for the seasons by using a percentage conversion on the standard program.

To find out more about the specific outdoor water use schedule for your area contact your local utility. The Rules, additional time restrictions during declared drought and other educational materials can be found at www.conservewatergeorgia.net, www.georgiadrought.org, www.dnr.state.ga.us/dnr/environ or call Georgia Environmental Protection Division at 1-888-373-5947 (in Atlanta area 404-656-4713).

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