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TRY DROUGHT TOLERANT LANDSCAPING TO CONSERVE WATER

- waterSmart offers tips for xeriscaping to 'beat the drought'

ATLANTA (June 13, 2007) – When spring and summer arrive, people often head to their local garden centers to purchase plants to brighten up their gardens and decks. Yet drought conditions and watering schedules often challenge homeowners to keep their new purchases alive. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Cobb County – Marietta Water Authority (CCMWA) have launched “*Save Water, Save Time, Save Money...waterSmart,*” a statewide educational program that teaches Georgians how to conserve water outdoors and protect their landscaping investment. By using the information and resources provided by the program, residents can learn how to incorporate water conservation practices into their landscape maintenance routines resulting in healthy lawn and garden.

“We are experiencing a severe drought, and people must take into account that the watering schedules are not going away any time soon,” says DNR Commissioner Noel Holcomb. “Water is a limited resource, and what we are using to maintain our lawns and gardens today may be critically needed in the weeks and months to come.”

On April 18, 2007, the State of Georgia was declared to be in a level two drought response, which limits outdoor water use to mornings only. The statewide outdoor water use schedules apply to watering plants, washing vehicles and cleaning hard surfaces. The schedules are:

- Odd-numbered addresses may use water outdoors on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays from midnight to 10 a.m.
- Even-numbered addresses may use water outdoors on Monday, Wednesdays and Saturdays from midnight to 10 a.m.

However, local cities and counties can impose more stringent watering schedules based on local conditions. For the most accurate watering schedules, Georgians should contact their local water provider.

The watersmart program has developed several resources to assist homeowners in selecting, planting and maintaining their landscapes. This information is available at www.ConserveWaterGeorgia.net by clicking on “tools for homeowners.” Resources include plant lists for both sun and shade gardens, a water audit for homeowners, tips for managing a waterSmart landscape, and much more.

One way to use less water outside is called xeriscaping, which is a gardening technique that can reduce watering needs by 50 percent. The goal is to create a landscape that is both water-wise and efficient. Xeriscaping can be made easy by following seven steps:

- Group plants together with similar watering requirements.
- Use organic matter in the soil to help retain water.
- Chose plants that will thrive in the local environment, such as plants that are native to Georgia.
- Use mulch to prevent plants from drying out.
- Use efficient irrigation like drip irrigation and automatic rain sensors.
- Design practical turf areas using a drought tolerant grass.
- Avoid over watering.

Whether you choose to xeriscape or not, waterSmart has established five conservation tips that will work with *any* landscape to help all Georgians conserve water year round. By raising awareness among consumers about water conservation, waterSmart aims to establish subtle habit changes among Georgians that will help them save water, money and their landscaping. Try these five tips to help your plants thrive:

1. **Water only once a week.** When it hasn't rained, a deep soaking every week will provide your plants with plenty of moisture. Plants only need one inch of water every seven to ten days to stay healthy.
2. **Soak, don't sprinkle.** When you water, aim the nozzle at the base of plants so more water will reach the roots.
3. **Don't water in the heat of the day.** You will only lose water to evaporation. If you have an automatic system, set it to come on in the early morning hours between 4 a.m. and 10 a.m.
4. **Turn off sprinkler systems when it rains.** Install an inexpensive rain sensor shut-off switch.
5. **Mulch!** Using pine straw, bark chips or ground hardwood mulch on the roots of plants and trees helps the soil retain water

Water conservation brochures and other information are being distributed throughout the state to help Georgians enjoy summer without worrying. To learn more about waterSmart, water conservation and the drought in Georgia, visit www.ConserveWaterGeorgia.net.

About waterSmart

The waterSmart program was developed in conjunction with the Georgia Water Wise Council and the Cobb County Cooperative Extension Service. It is endorsed by the Georgia Green Industry Association and the Georgia Turf Association, as well as numerous lawn and garden experts. The waterSmart program also has partnered with DNR and the Education Roundtable to provide additional education and outreach tools aimed at reducing outdoor water use.