

# Water-Wise Landscaping

There are few additions to your home that are more aesthetically pleasing than a well-manicured yard, yet it seems like they are a continual money pit that requires a great deal of time and money to keep your yard looking good. The intention of this article is to try to give you some helpful tips and tricks to improve both areas, which consequently will also help you be a better steward of our shared water resources.

## Design

Proper planning in the development of a new or existing landscape is a critical component of the beginning of your resource saving experience. We have a pamphlet available in our lobby or online at the URL below titled “Water-Wise Landscape Guide” that is very helpful in guiding you through the process of mapping your landscape and taking things like wind direction, sun exposure, and drainage swells into consideration. This pamphlet also gives you good tips and tricks about creating watering zones based on need, plant placement and recommended soil amendments. In total it is a 7 step process this resource walks you through to create a landscape that will be water efficient and requires less overall maintenance. For those that may find this a little overwhelming, we recommend reaching out to the UGA extension office or a landscape professional.

[https://northgeorgiawater.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/MDC\\_WaterWise\\_Landscape\\_Final-7MB.pdf](https://northgeorgiawater.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/MDC_WaterWise_Landscape_Final-7MB.pdf)

## Watering

Watering based on a plants need rather than a regular schedule is better for the plant and for your wallet. Grass should bounce back when you walk on it, if your footprint still shows up several minutes later it may be experiencing a lack of water and needs irrigating. On the other hand, if you had several inches of rain a few days prior, you most likely do not need to water your yard again. A helpful interactive tool to determine watering needs is found at <https://www.pennington.com/all-products/grass-seed/resources/water-rate-calculator>. This website allows you calculate how much you should water your yard based on location, type of grass and recent rainfall.

Tips:

- Water lawns and outdoor plants only between 4pm-10am. It’s Georgia law.
- More plants die in Georgia from overwatering than under watering. One inch of rain or water every 7-10 days is all your plants need.
- Adjust sprinklers so only your lawn is watered and not the house, sidewalk or street.
- Water the base of the plant instead of the leaves. This saves water and reduces disease.
- Drip irrigation for most plants provide a more effective way (30%-50% less water use) due to the lack of evaporation loss from system types.
- Nitrogen promotes water –demanding new growth. Fertilize less and use a fertilizer that contains nitrogen in a slow release form, such as an organic product.
- Group plants with the same watering needs together.
- Look for EPA WaterSense labeled Irrigation Controller, which acts like a thermostat for your sprinkler system, telling it when to turn on and off based on local weather and landscape conditions.
- Install a rain gauge in your yard to monitor weekly rainfall.

## Mowing

When it comes to mowing the lawn, shorter is not always better. In fact, cutting your grass too short slows growth and makes it more susceptible to heat and drought. By allowing the grass to grow a little taller promotes deeper roots and makes for a healthier lawn. It is also recommended that you cut your yard more often so that no more than 1/3 of the leaf length is cut at one time, otherwise you risk shocking the grass. A helpful chart for different types of grass and recommended mowing heights can be found below.

<b>Turfgrass</b>	<b>Inches</b>
Centipede	1"-1.5 "
Common Bermuda	1"-2"
Hybrid Bermuda	0.5"-1.5
Tall Fescue	2"-3"
St. Augustine	2"-3"
Zoysia	0.5"-1.5"

## Mulch

Besides serving as an attractive addition to your yard, mulch serves an important role for your plants by preventing evaporation, by inhibiting weed growth, preventing soil erosion, and moderating soil temperature. Organic mulch such as hardwood chips, straw, leaves, pine needles, or grass clippings will help improve the condition of soil, by adding nutrients as it decomposes. Inorganic mulches like rocks, pebbles, or gravel may help to eliminate weeds. Avoid using rock mulches in sunny areas or around non-arid climate plants, as they radiate large amounts of heat and promote water loss that can lead to scorching. Leave a few inches of space between organic mulches and the base of trees or other woody plants to prevent rot. Apply 3" of mulch under plants in your landscape, more than that can actually restrict water flow to plant roots.

Tips:

- Extend mulched areas 2-3 times beyond the tree canopy spread.
- Placing newspaper under organic mulches improves the soil and water retention.
- Remove weeds and thatch as necessary so they don't compete with your desired plants for water.

### **Resources:**

<https://www.epa.gov/watersense/turfgrass-and-water-efficiency>

<https://www.epa.gov/watersense/landscaping-tips>

**"Water-Wise Landscape Guide for the Georgia Piedmont"** printed by UGA Cooperative Extension

**"Water Conservation Tips"** printed and created by the Metropolitan North Georgia Planning District