



By Rick Upchurch

NatureScapes President and CEO

A key ingredient in the success of all landscapes is something that has become quite precious *and* expensive in Georgia – water. Now that we are through the drought, it is even more important to seek opportunities to conserve water while creating and maintaining beautiful landscapes that visually enrich the community in which we live.

It is expected that Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue soon will sign the Water Stewardship Act (Senate Bill 370) that covers a range of initiatives for conserving water indoors and out. What will this bill mean to the landscape industry and its customers? First and foremost, it reinforces the principles of good water stewardship, which many landscape companies, such as NatureScapes, have been implementing for years.

Daily Outdoor Watering

Current restrictions allow outdoor water use any time of day, three days a week based on odd- and even-numbered addresses. The Water Stewardship Act will allow *daily* outdoor watering “for the purposes of planting, growing, managing or maintaining ground cover, trees, shrubs and other plants between the hours of 4 p.m. and 10 a.m.”

Reputable landscape companies already encourage customers to water within this window. Early morning hours allow water to soak into the ground before the sun’s heat evaporates it. Evening hours reduce wastefulness, but watering at night can potentially result in various fungi and mold growth due to excess water that sits on top of the soil overnight.

Additionally, there are several activities that have no time of day limitations including the irrigation of:

- personal food gardens
- new plants, seed or turf for a period of 30 days after installation
- horticultural crops held for sale, resale or installation
- athletic fields, golf courses, or public turf grass recreational areas

The full list can be found in Section Four of the bill at <http://www.legis.state.ga.us/>.



Retrofits for Water Efficient Irrigation Systems

In addition to modifying the watering schedule, the bill *encourages* “residential and commercial retrofits for water efficient landscaping irrigation systems.”

In the spirit of conserving water, there is nothing more frustrating than seeing an irrigation system pumping water onto a landscape while it’s raining. Smart technology and sensing devices can be added to most systems to prevent overwatering. In fact, the latest smart technology can monitor solar radiation and temperature to further enhance system effectiveness and save property owners and managers water costs. Other retrofits include improved nozzles that broadcast water more efficiently onto the landscape and reduce run off.

Landscape Best Management Practices

The bill also *encourages* the “installation of landscapes in commercial and residential settings utilizing landscape best management practices that include soil preparation, plant selection, and water use efficiency.”

Soil that is prepared properly will absorb moisture better, which also means less run off and waste. Plants selected for their ability to survive in the heat of summer without large daily doses of water are kinder on the budget and environment. Overall, these best practices not only achieve the ultimate goal of using minimal amounts of water, they also result in healthier landscapes.

In summary, the Water Stewardship Act will not require any major changes in outdoor watering, which will allow your landscape investment to grow and prosper. However, it is the small changes you can make – like installing smart devices and drought-tolerant plants – that will make a big difference in water conservation and your budget.