

Healthy Landscapes Vital To Water System

Public perceptions are difficult to work with. Erroneous public perceptions are not only difficult; they are dangerous, especially when they become the foundation for bad public policy. Yet that could be exactly what is happening in Georgia with the states current watering ban. This communicates to the public, legislators and policy makers that landscaping is “non-essential”. This perception could not be further from the truth.

The urbanization of Georgia has been enormous, providing jobs and economic opportunities for millions of people. It has also brought problems. Urbanization decreases water quality and increases water use. About one-half of the land cleared or disturbed for development is covered by impervious surfaces such as roads, roofs and parking lots and is a significant factor to the current water crisis.

Landscape or “urban agriculture” has become the best method of addressing these problems. Landscapes are critical to water management and storage in an urban environment. Lawns, ground covers and vegetation are crucial to managing ground water and assist in retention, filtration and purification of a water shed. Vegetative systems also increase the urban forest, remove CO₂ from the air, reduce the urban heat effect, improve air quality, provide critical wildlife habitats and provide a more aesthetically pleasing, sustainable environment. Inadequate landscape and plant health care can create additional irrigation and storm water costs for the public as well as flooding, pollution and erosion for surrounding properties.

Autumn and winter temperatures provide the optimum growing season for trees and shrubs, allowing several months of vigorous root growth, in turn requiring much less water in times of drought and allowing years of healthy growth.

Few people understand their own water use. Residential water use represents roughly 50% to 65% of all water use. Indoor water use is typically 80% of all residential water use. No one should expect an outdoor watering ban to have much of an impact on the current water crisis.

The urban agriculture industry is committed to being an active participant in helping Georgia throughout its current water crisis, but we must insist that the state address the lack of water infrastructure, including water storage needs so that it wont become necessary to address another water crisis by placing economic hardships on one of the few industries in Georgia that plays a vital role in improving environmental standards in our rapidly urbanizing state.