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Saving Water Through Landscaping

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Along with being surrounded by water, Florida has many lakes, ponds, and rivers, which gives the impression that there is an abundant amount of water for our use. This isn't necessarily the case because the freshwater resources are limited, and the demands on them are rising due to the state's population increasing and recent drought conditions. So, conserving water is important to have enough in the future. Since approximately 50 percent of our freshwater is used in lawns and plant beds, the landscape is a great place to begin implementing water conservation methods. These methods can be put into practice by modifying or redesigning landscapes that will reduce the amount of water needed to maintain the landscape.

Natural or ecological landscaping

This type of landscaping involves selecting plants that are best for the area's temperatures and rainfall. In addition, soil type, drainage, and irrigation water quality are also considered. By picking plants that will do well in your particular climate, this will increase their chances to become established and reduce the potential of disease and poor health. Usually selected plants are native species because they are adapted to the weather and soil, but they may not always thrive because changes due to development, such as fill dirt and drainage pattern changes, can result in a native plant not doing well. This reason is why you need to know the soil characteristics and features of the area and match plants accordingly. For example, place vegetation that likes wet conditions in low areas or areas with poor drainage and place vegetation that tolerates drought in dry spots or along a berm.

Oasis landscaping

Since natural landscaping is a big departure from traditional landscaping, which requires a lot of water and maintenance, oasis landscaping is a compromise between the two landscaping styles. Showy plants that are high maintenance and require a lot of water are placed in areas with the most visual impact like entranceways and courtyards. This area has an elaborate irrigation system and requires the most maintenance and water. Natural landscaping is done in areas that are less visible, such as sides of buildings and remote areas. The space between the two types of landscaping acts as a transition zone where the plants require less water than the oasis area but more water than the natural area.

If neither of these types of landscapes appeals to you, there are some things you could still do that would help save water in your present landscape.

- Group plants according to their water needs. For example, plants that require a lot of water are grouped separately from drought tolerant plants.
- Apply mulch in plant beds. Three to four-inches of mulch helps prevent evaporation from the soil, suppresses weeds, and moderates soil temperatures.
- Use drought tolerant plants and turfgrass. Your local county extension service can guide you in plant selection.
- Create windbreaks, which can be done by walls, fences, shrubs, and hedges. The benefit is that it reduces wind velocity, which decreases the amount of water lost by evaporation during irrigation.

Water conservation in the landscape can be extensive like the natural landscape design or simple like applying mulch, but any amount of water you can save will be beneficial. I encourage you to take the steps to save water in your landscape.