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It’s a Dry Heat!

Drought and Your HOA

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Coping with Water Restrictions

Hardest hit by the long-term water emergency have been more than 60 municipalities served by the North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD), which have been required to observe mandatory outdoor water restrictions (Stage 3*) since June, 2006. These apply to everything from watering landscapes and...
filling swimming pools to washing vehicles and hosing driveways and sidewalks.

In Tarrant County and areas which have imposed no mandatory watering bans thus far, HOAs may face a similar dilemma. As the lush, emerald green lawns and abundant summer annuals that homeowners desire and expect wither in the sweltering Texas summer, increased landscape watering may cause your HOA’s water bills to skyrocket. Of equal concern, cutting back to voluntarily conserve or comply with mandatory water rationing will cause drought-stricken grounds to suffer. Rapidly-receding fountains, ponds, and swimming pools may resist your efforts to maintain their summertime aquatic appeal.

*Stage 3 Restrictions. Many counties in our area remain in Stage 3 of their drought conservation plans (Collin, Denton, Dallas, Hunt, Kaufman, Rains, Rockwall) At this writing, mandatory restrictions have not been imposed for Tarrant county.

*Individual cities may also implement their own mandatory water restrictions, so it’s important for homeowners to know their local requirements.

Be a Water-wise HOA

Even while many communities have restricted their water consumption for non-essential uses, water consumption has increased 29% this year compared with the same period last year, according to NTMWD. Some cities, such as Rowlett and McKinney, have implemented tier water rates (higher rates for higher consumption) to encourage conservation. The drought and increased demand due to population growth have prompted the NTMWD to launch a campaign to encourage consumers to reduce water consumption by 5%. Practice these water-saving strategies to reduce water use.

Plug the leaks. Small leaks have extreme consequences. A dripping faucet, for example, can waste nearly 20 gallons of water a day, or 7,000 gallons a year. One broken sprinkler head can use up to 225 gallons per 15 minute cycle and cause other sprinkler heads on the same system to malfunction. Work closely with your HOA’s manager to repair these common area water-wasters. If you do not have an onsite CMA manager, especially be vigilant to report malfunctioning timers and broken sprinkler heads on automatic sprinkler systems.

Prime the pool. If your HOA operates a pool, have your pool serviced regularly to catch leaks and have them promptly repaired. If the water level varies drastically from day to day, this may indicate a leak. Your pool professional can alert your manager of problems such as a faulty pool valve. Be aware that in some communities, swimming pools may not be drained and refilled this summer except to replace normal water loss.

Observe mandatory outdoor water restrictions. Be familiar with the restrictions and enforcement which apply to your community. Penalties vary from city to city and from water supply to water supply. For example, Frisco is shutting off violators’ sprinkler systems, while Rockwall will shut off repeat violators’ water and charge steep fees to get it reconnected. Fines range from about $100 to up to $2,000, depending on the city.

Communicate with homeowners. Your Board may wish to appoint an ad hoc committee to research your HOA’s water consumption, set a goal for reduction and communicate to the Board and homeowners about what your association is doing to use water more efficiently and wisely. You’ll be helping your neighbors and helping Texas water supplies last.
Tap a Seedbed of Landscape Know-How

Where can your HOA find practical ideas to conserve and beautify? What if you had access to a gardening expert to help you enhance the beauty of the community and conserve precious resources, including financial ones? Your Landscape Committee should consider consulting a valuable local resource that is often overlooked. The Texas A&M Extension Service for your county offers information about Certified Master Gardeners in your area who can offer assistance.

Certified Master Gardeners (CMG) are volunteers who complete a specified number of hours of education and gardening projects under the direction of their county Texas A&M Cooperative Extension Service. Once certified, they serve their communities by identifying and participating in gardening projects which beautify and educate the community. They know and apply landscaping practices which are well-suited to this geography and employ environmentally-friendly methods to conserve precious resources. Best of all, these services are free of charge to organizations such as schools, libraries, historic homes and non-profits groups in the counties they serve.

Melanie Souder, resident of Bridlewood HOA and CMA administrative assistant onsite at Bridlewood, received her Master Gardening certification in 2006. Melanie has a personal passion for gardening and pursues projects to apply her knowledge along with fellow CMGs in Denton county.

“The Master Gardeners and the Master Naturalists are such a valuable resource and source of education,” says Melanie. “Sharing my knowledge with others who want to create beautiful, functional landscapes that conserve natural resources and reduce the release of chemicals into our environment is one way I am involved. If CMA’s clients can use this resource to find cost-saving landscaping solutions, then it’s a win/win.”

Your HOA’s Landscape Committee can find information about your county’s cooperative extension and master gardeners in your area by visiting http://county-tx.tamu.edu/.

WATER-SMART GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

10 Tips to Keep Your Grounds from Soaking You

Summer’s lengthy hot, dry conditions can test the endurance of many plants ... and boards. Mulching, mowing and fertilizing greatly impact the water efficiency of any landscape, as well as its ability to survive a drought. On behalf of your association, your CMA manager can help you implement these water-smart maintenance tips with your landscape professionals.

1. Mulch plant roots. It improves soil, reduces moisture loss and keeps roots cool during summer months. Experts recommend that you use 4 – 6 inches of mulch during a drought. Unmulched soil may lose twice as much water to evaporation as mulched soil.

2. Mow better and less frequently. Raise your lawnmower blade and cut grass to a height of 3 inches—this shades the soil, which reduces evaporation, and allows roots to grow deeper.

3. Properly fertilize non-native plants. Apply the right amount and at the right time (once in the fall and once in the spring) to reduce mowing and watering. Excessive fertilization is also a major source of pollution of streams and groundwater.

4. Irrigate efficiently. Apply only enough water to moisten the root zone of your plants (4 to 6 inches deep). Experts recommend watering your lawn deeply and infrequently to promote a strong root system. Some areas require as little as 1 inch every seven days.

5. Use soaker hoses instead of sprinklers. Drip irrigation waters trees, shrubs and beds more efficiently by applying water directly to the root, and reduces water loss from evaporation. Where practical, limit the use of a sprinkler system to water large areas of turf.

6. Control your controller. Manually operate sprinkler systems instead of using a timer to avoid over-watering. Install automatic sensors to save on outdoor watering by automatically turning off your system when it rains or is below freezing.

7. Check irrigation systems. Replace clogged drip emitters and repair leaks. Check sprinkler systems for directional aim and broken heads to prevent watering driveways, sidewalks and streets. You may want to have an irrigation professional do an irrigation audit of your systems.

8. Grow native. Select more drought-tolerant native plants, grouping plants together that have similar watering requirements. If plants have died or are not performing well, plant new ones – preferably low water-use varieties – before the summer heat sets in.

9. Remove weeds. They compete with plants for water.

“Native plants grow naturally in our area. They are inherently drought-tolerant because they have adapted to survive without supplemental watering. Non-native species of plants can also be drought-tolerant, as well as “adapted” to survive our extreme temperature fluctuations from summer through winter.”

His firm, David C. Baldwin, Inc., www.davidcbaldwin.net, uses a combination of native and adapted species to create landscapes that are visually appealing throughout the year. His plant material palette typically uses large masses of ornamental grasses, which go dormant in the winter, in combination with evergreen shrubs and groundcovers as a framework or backdrop.

Baldwin has been the landscape architect for Stonebridge Ranch in McKinney, Texas, and has designed most of the neighborhood entries, streetscapes, common areas, parks and playgrounds for the past twelve years. The community adapted its landscape design prior to the current drought restrictions as a means to create a more sustainable grounds plan and has reaped benefits by significantly decreasing water use for common areas.

A project on the north of Virginia Parkway started in 2001 illustrates how the community has beautifully blended the traditional manicured Bermuda grass turf with new drought-tolerant plantings. The design makes use of a Bermuda grass strip between the street curb and the sidewalk and, Buffalo grass, a drought-tolerant native turf, beyond the sidewalk up to the walking trail. Evergreen holly hedges along the fencing provide the backdrop for other seasonal vegetation.

The trees within the Buffalo grass areas use a bubbler irrigation system, which allows trees to be watered separately while cutting back on Buffalo grass irrigation. Allowing the Buffalo grass to grow to its maximum height of 5” to 6” has cut down on maintenance costs, reducing mowings to about twice a year.

Visit these websites www.savedallswater.com and www.txsmartscape.com which list “water-wise” plants such as lantana, salvia, yarrow and Mexican sage to add color to seasonal beds. The sites also provide a number of water conservation tips. Your association manager can obtain bids from qualified landscape professionals to develop a plan that can be installed in phases as your HOA’s budget permits.

Photos courtesy of David C. Baldwin, Inc.

Adapt (continued from page 1)

In the medians of Stonebridge Drive north of Virginia, the landscape designer used plant materials which would provide year-round seasonal interest through flowering, texture, and/or fall color. A variety of native plants, adapted plants, ornamental grasses, groundcovers and drought-tolerant perennials in large masses have a noticeable impact for drivers passing by.

The pink shrub is ‘Anthony Waterer’ Spiraea (Spiraea ‘bumalda ‘Anthony Waterer’) which is an “adapted” plant. The yellow planting mass in the background is ‘Stella d’Oro Daylily (Hemerocallis ‘Stella d’Oro) planted under ‘Shoal Creek’ Vitex or Chaste Tree(Vitex Agnus-castis ‘Shoal Creek’) which has purple blooms in the spring.

Well Water Irrigation

Baldwin also noted that a number of his developer clients are installing wells to supply water for common area landscaping as a result of last summer’s drought restrictions. He said Star Creek in Allen will be digging a well northeast of Waters and Stacy Rd. Plans are in the works for a well to provide common area irrigation for Newman Village, a new Darling Homes development in Frisco, as well.

“Water quality is a big issue for water for plantings, and typically, the deeper the well the better the water quality,” said Baldwin. “Bad water quality from a well can lead to poor performance for plant material growth or it can even kill landscaping.”

He advises that water from a well be pumped into a pond or lake, where the bad elements and salts can either settle out or evaporate. The cleaner water then can be filtered and pumped from the pond or lake into the irrigation system. “The well and irrigation system is an expensive proposition, but clients are realizing the long-term value may eventually offset initial costs,” Baldwin said.

The trail running under the bridge at Stonebridge Drive features Gulf Muhly grass (muhlenbergia capillaries). This native grass can be used in a large mass to create a striking color effect of feathery blossoms in the fall. Common ornamental grasses that are used locally include Hameln Grass (Pennisetum alopecuroides ‘Hameln’) Maidengrass (Miscanthus sinensis), and Weeping Love Grass (Eragrostis curvula).
Pest Patrol: Trounce Ant Bullies

When it comes to controlling fire ants, here’s the rule of thumb—Kill the Varmints! Our moderate Texas climate is the perfect haven for red imported fire ants. When this fiendish species invades an area, they do it with a vengeance, invading homes, school yards, athletic fields, golf courses, and parks and damaging plants and electrical equipment.

Known for their aggressive behavior, fire ants swarm over anyone or anything that disturbs their nest. Their painful stings are inflicted on wild animals, pets or people, in some instances, even killing them. What does this mean to your HOA? Money for repairs and eradication, not to mention the risk of painful stings to homeowners, their children and pets.

Fire ant mounds, the most visible evidence of infestation, will be found in open areas such as lawns, pastures, golf courses, along roadsides and in sidewalk cracks. However, mounds will not always be visible. Fire ants will nest in electrical equipment (computers and televisions), water meter casings, under carpets, in wall voids, and around plumbing. Outside, they can be found in gardens, compost piles, and mulched flowerbeds.

If you suspect your HOA occupies prime turf in this battle of man vs. nature, head off fire ant bullies by having common areas treated before the invaders infest your neighborhood. Promote awareness among homeowners by encouraging them to treat their yards in conjunction with the HOA’s treatment of common areas.

Keep in mind, there are literally thousands of ant species, some relatively benign. If you’re unsure whether you’re battling fire ants, call on a professional pest control company to diagnose the infestation and treat it. Hiring a professional to treat your neighborhood can ensure that your treatments are applied properly and on time. Some pest control companies offer lower individual yard treatment prices for neighborhood treatment programs. Your CMA manager can arrange for bids to have a professional apply baits or seed spreader works well to scatter the bait over a yard-size area.

Your HOA needn’t be bullied by fire ants this summer. Your vigilance and persistence now will pay off to keep your community safe from these unwelcome intruders.

Texas Two-Step

Attack Ants on the Home Front

To mount a coordinated assault, consider the Texas Two-Step Method, which gives excellent control of red imported fire ants, especially in larger lawns or when applied to entire neighborhoods. By joining with neighbors, you can reduce costs, improve control and have fun at the same time. It takes longer for fire ants to re-infest when larger areas and multiple yards are treated with this method.

The Texas Agricultural Extension Service outlines the Texas Two-Step Method, a how-to guide for homeowners and neighborhoods. Visit the www.tcebookstore.org/pubinfo.cfm?pubid=572.

Some highlights:

**Step One: Feed Them and Reap**

Fire ant bait, a product containing food, plus an insecticide, is broadcast over a yard or larger areas. These particles are collected by worker ants and carried to the colony where it’s shared with the queen and other ants. Baits take time to do their work, from 2 weeks to as much as 6 months, if the bait is one that works to regulate the insect’s growth cycle.

Baits are effective only when fire ants are actively foraging for food, so applying them at the right time is important. For most of Texas, the best time to bait is between May and September. Apply baits in the evening when the ground temperature is cooler and ants are actively foraging. A fertilizer spreader or seed spreader works well to scatter the bait over a yard-size area.

**Step Two: Treat Problem Mounds**

Where fire ants have already erected mounds, attack the enemy’s turf. Applying an insecticide or other treatment directly to a fire ant mound is the fastest way to destroy most fire ant colonies. It isn’t necessary to treat all mounds after applying bait.

Step two treatment should target colonies located next to foundations, in high-traffic common areas or other trouble spots, such as electrical equipment. A number of products can be applied to mounds in the form of granules, liquid drenches, and dry dust, all of which contain pesticides Organic or plant-derived products will also control fire ants, but may cost more and act more slowly than conventional pesticides.
Water: The Fate of our Most Precious Resource (paperback)
by Marq de Villiers

With a keen eye for detail and a solid command of the scientific literature, a Canadian journalist travels worldwide and reports on news that is rarely good. The world is running out of its most vital resource in the places where it’s most needed. From a perspective of humankind’s history of managing water, he tells wide-ranging stories of problems and solutions being implemented worldwide.

"The frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives."

—Native American Saying