

# NATIVE PLANTS REDUCE WATER NEEDS

by Robert Craig

Blaine Williams, landscape consultant and past president of the Uniola Chapter, believes that within the next ten years the South Florida Water Management District will allocate little or no water for landscape irrigation. His landscape designs reflect that conviction.

In The Reserve, a 2300-acre residential golf and tennis community west of Port St. Lucie, he minimized demands for irrigation in several ways.

The primary focus is to retain as much of the native vegetation as possible through what Blaine calls "micro-siting". He personally supervises the clearing of land, looking at each stage of development closely, and monitoring the various stages of engineering, clearing, and road con-

struction to ensure the least impact possible on the site.

On a 1¼ acre lot in The Reserve, 65% of the area is covered with native vegetation, primarily saw palmetto and slash pine. These large beds of native plants reduces the area planted with water-loving grass, cutting down on the need for — not just water — but also fertilizer and pesticides.

The developers of The Reserve were convinced in 1983 to go with this approach to landscaping because they were native Floridians with a natural affinity for the land, and because it is cost-effective. Cost-effectiveness is achieved mostly from the decreased demand on the water supply. Blaine's example is that the average lot requires installation of an irrigation system that costs approximately \$3000. But if the developer preserves 50% of the drought-tolerant native vegetation on the lot, the cost of the irrigation system is almost halved.

Even with this intense attention to decreasing the demand for irrigation, The Reserve is projected to use an average of four million gallons of water a day after completion. An 18-hole golf course can use as much as 350,000 gallons of water on an average day. The two 18-hole golf courses and one 9-hole practice course planned for The Reserve are projected to use a combined one million gallons on an average day.

Blaine does not expect a quick turnaround in homeowners' attitudes toward the predominant use of exotics in the landscape, until water for irrigation becomes restricted. Radical changes in this attitude will occur at that time, and it is not far off in south Florida.

## XERISCAPE

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The rapidly growing human population, increasing numbers of tourists, and the influx of citrus growers moving south because of freezes in north and central Florida have dramatically increased the demand on water supplies in south Florida.

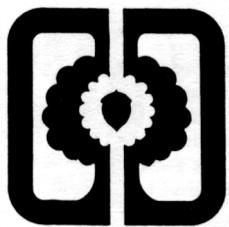
The South Florida Water Management District is actively promoting xeriscape — landscaping with properly located, dry-habitat native plants and drought-tolerant exotics.

Approximately 50% of south Florida's water use is for outdoor landscaping (not including agricultural irrigation). Xeriscape could minimize the impact of water restrictions and rationing on lawns and gardens if those measures become necessary.

SFWMD has launched an effort to educate the public about xeriscape, including:

- educational conferences
- a model landscape code
- a fifteen-minute video on xeriscape
- xeriscape demonstration gardens
- a plant guide
- a computer program listing natives and their growth characteristics, offered free, that runs on an IBM-PC.

Information can be requested by writing to the South Florida Water Management District, P.O. Box 24680, 3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, 33416.



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