

says lawn care professionals would be asked for input regarding plant selection and other technical requirements, such as irrigation and drainage systems.

Efficient systems conserve

Bill Le Blanc, eastern region general manager for Hardie Irrigation of Florida, says state regulations affect water use, drainage, and more recently the recycling of effluent water. In certain sections of the state, more effluent is being returned by packaging plants to home irrigation systems.

Le Blanc believes xeriscaping—considered by some to be an “anti-turf” movement—is an opportunity for the turf people to install more

The best defense is to form a green industry coalition of all irrigators.

drought-tolerant grasses, and for irrigation people to install proper systems.

“Just as we got used to driving smaller cars,” predicts Le Blanc, “we will find ourselves wanting to live with more economically designed and managed irrigation systems.”

Executive director of the Florida Irrigation Society, Fred McGee, agrees that lousy irrigation systems make for lousy water conservation, “and we want to help out the water management district by putting in proper irrigation systems that don’t waste or pollute water.”

According to McGee, the society is lobbying for more regulation of the irrigation industry, to put the squeeze on fly-by-night installers who buy a business license for \$15, throw some PVC pipe in the trunk and call themselves irrigators.

“There is no such professional regulation at this time. And with 75 percent of Florida’s water being used for irrigation purposes, much is wasted.

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Can xeriscape and turf proponents co-exist?

In these times of drought and water bans, the term “xeriscape” is heard more and more. Cities and counties are even passing “xeriscape legislation,” so called because of xeriscape’s minimum turf and water requirements.

Proponents of turfgrass, most notably the American Sod Producers Association (ASPA), recently challenged the South Florida Water Management District on its use of the words “limited turf areas,” when drafting its xeriscape code.

After discussion with the ASPA, the district changed the code to read “practical turf areas.”

“Generally I agree with the concept of reducing water waste,” says ASPA president Ed Davis. “What I disagree strongly with is their (the Water District) attacks on turf as being the cause of water waste. The water that’s wasted is wasted by people, not by the turf.”

Davis is concerned over what he believes will happen in the long run if turf areas are drastically reduced.

“Turf is one of the best, if not the best, groundwater filters available. If we get a negative attitude towards turf, we’re going to get an imbalance. The evapotranspiration and other benefits of turf have been proven.”

Tom Teets, senior water use engineer and xeriscape project manager for the South Florida Water District, was surprised at ASPA’s objection.

“In Texas, which has a huge sod industry, there’s never been a problem with xeriscaping,” relates Teets. “They’ve accepted that turf does require more irrigation.”

The controversy goes back to southern Florida’s preparations for a model landscape code, which was named the Xeriscape Code.

“What the contractors had done,” recounts Bruce Adams, assistant director of land and water planning and national president of the Xeriscape Council, “was put together an advisory committee to hammer out a consensus document which would act as a model landscape code. It was then submitted and accepted by the district. That consensus document had representatives from every major affected industry, including the turfgrass people.

“We concluded that we were aiming at placing

turfgrass in both the design and function of a landscape, in the most ‘practical’ areas of landscape. And if we reduce turfgrass to any extent, it would be to that extent in which we did away with the hard-to-manage, hard-to-irrigate parts of the landscape.”

Adams insists that both groups are working toward the same goal. “Our backing of the turfgrass association is to make sure that we, the industry and the public support them in improving the grades of turfgrass that are produced—in looking at the new drought-resistant varieties that we and the industry are researching and promoting with our funding.”

ASPA executive director Doug Fender denies any adversarial relationship between turf and xeriscape. “I’m sure if you were to talk to xeriscape proponents, they would not describe their desired result as rocks, bushes and stumps, but as something which would allow for vegetation,” assures Fender. “The extreme element would have nothing growing. Somewhere in between there’s ground for us to talk and work together to achieve practical solutions for the environment.”

Fender believes the relationship between the “turf-ites” and xeriscapers could be improved by more communication. Letters between leaders of all groups and attendance at one another’s meetings are two ways to better relate.

“I think to some extent there’s a feeling that enemy camps are forming,” says Fender. “And, as with any problem, it’s from a lack of information.”

With the techniques and plant material now available, there is a huge opportunity to save large amounts of water and still maintain quality projects, believes Tom Ash, director of the Water Conservation Demonstration Garden in Riverside, California. “It’s more a question of changing the homeowner’s attitude,” he says. “The first aspect is limiting the size of lawns. Provide a lawn area for exactly what you need. I advise people to think about their lawn’s size and use water-efficient varieties like tall fescues, perhaps Bermudagrasses or zoysias that are being introduced into the industry, not eliminating lawns.

“I think the xeriscape fanatics who are into cactus and rocks are the extreme. They’re not going to attract many people and are probably going to hurt the intentions of the mainstream xeriscapers.”

—Terry McIver □