



GARDENING

Planting for Energy Conservation by Marc C. Dick

Florida continues to gain 800 to 900 new residents every day. Their presence increases the stress on water resources, increases land development, and taxes the capacity of the state's electricity generators. The native Florida vegetation has been overlooked as a potential solution to some of these problems. The proper application of energy conservation principles to the "new" landscapes of Florida may offer some solutions. Vegetation can be integrated into land development to conserve electricity and water.

Residential use consumes the majority of the electricity available for air-conditioning (cooling and heating). Homeowners (and sometimes business owners) should be able to reduce their energy expense by modification of the "microclimate" around their home or business. A site's microclimate can be maintained by *preserving* vegetation on development sites, and can be changed to benefit our needs by planting trees, shrubs, and groundcovers around buildings and other outdoor areas. A simple strategy of shading walls, the ground surface and, where possible, the roof of a structure should be considered.

Water is our world's life blood, not only in human bodies, but in all living things. The use of water-efficient landscaping is one approach to conservation of this precious resource. Xeriscape principles were introduced in the 1980s and legislation enacted in sections of the Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Code in the last several years has required local governments in Florida to consider and implement "xeriscape ordinances" appropriate for their communities. Some communities simply modified the criteria outlined by the state laws.

The seven basic principles of water-efficient landscaping include: planning and design, soil analysis, appropriate plant selection, practical turf areas, efficient irrigation, mulches, and appropriate maintenance.

Native Florida plant materials can be utilized to accomplish energy conservation when used in the proper manner. Our pocketbooks and our future generations will be thankful for the insight gained and applied to our environment today. Spread the word that native plants can do more than just be something pretty to look at!

Marc Dick is a native Floridian. He grew up in the Panhandle and is currently living in Brevard County. He received his Bachelor of Landscape Architecture from the University of Florida, and his business provides professional landscape architecture services throughout Florida.