

## **Oconee Co. Drought Management Tips**

**Here in the county, over the past couple of days we have experienced 90-degree-plus temperatures that has made everybody say it is hot outside. Truly it has been hot and humid and folks, these temperatures will continue because it is just getting started. Forecasts for a thunderstorm brought needed rain, and we were truly blessed; but much, much more is needed. As we all know, we are facing a drought situation in our county once again. Dealing with the drought is no fun at all, but we have to prepare for it. From farmers to homeowners, no one is exempt from the drought. We love to grow things from vegetables to ornamental shrubs to immaculate lawns; and growing things takes a lot of water. With that said and with our current situation, conserving water is a big challenge, but I know it can be done with a little know how. In this week's article, hopefully you will gather some important tips about managing water wisely in your landscape. Let's take a look at some great concepts that will help you save water and time during this year's drought.**

**In your garden or landscape area, it needs essential water. This can be achieved by reducing the amount with drip irrigation. Purchasing a soaker hose does a tremendous job of getting water down to the roots where it is needed. This also aids in less evaporation and loss of water. You can work this in combination with mulching. Make mulching an essential element to your garden and landscape area. Mulching is a great way to conserve water and maintain soil moisture. Mulches can range from pine straw, wheat straw, pine bark and shredded hardwood. These mulches conserve water very well in any landscape. Use about 3 to 5 inches of mulch to create a good layer of organic material to cover your landscape area. In addition, when it does rain, we need to capitalize on the excess that runs off the roof of the house. Almost 700 gallons of water runs off the house with a good hard rain. Utilizing rain barrels is a great way to collect that water and having it on demand will make your vegetable garden or landscape plants very happy in this year's drought. You can purchase rain barrels, or you can make your own by simply getting a 55-gallon drum and doing a little modification and placing it under your down spot and you're in business of collecting and conserving water.**

**During this year's drought, here are some great management tips that will help your landscape plants maintain and sustain themselves during the growing season. Please don't fertilize trees and shrubs. If you must fertilize them, do so in late winter before spring green up. Fertilizing plants in dry periods will dehydrate plant roots and will put significant stress on the plants. In the case of annual flowers and roses, they require regular feeding to grow and flower well. Nitrogen is needed; however, reduce the amount so that you won't inhibit root growth, which leads to less efficient extraction of moisture from the soil. As for turf grass management, aerating the soil will make improvements in the movement of water and nutrients in the soil which encourages roots to grow deeply and become drought tolerant. Finally, take care of weeds in the landscaper area because they compete for water just as much as other plants in your landscape. Be sure to continually monitor your landscape area for plants that may be affected by this drought. We need to keep working together to conserve as much as we can all the precious resources of water in our daily lives. If you would like more information on how to conserve water in your landscape please don't hesitate to call the Oconee Co. Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by at 23 Water Street, Watkinsville, GA.**