



XERISCAPING, ECO-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPE DESIGNS HELP HOMES SAVE ENERGY IN FLORIDA CLIMATE

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. (August 13, 2010) – It is hot during Florida summers and for most homeowners that means more air conditioning, more watering the lawn and higher utility bills. But Michael Lenahen, president of Aurora Custom Homes, is seeing a change in homebuyers when it comes to their energy usage and desire to practice environmentally conscious behaviors in the form of their landscaping choices. He notes that many custom homeowners are opting to incorporate xeriscaping and eco-friendly landscape designs into their home to squelch energy usage and lower monthly utility bills.

“We recently completed a 10,000-plus square foot home at the beach that includes an extensive number of landscaping features that will save the homeowners money and energy over the years, including xeriscaping with the use of plants native to Florida in an effort to reduce water consumption,” said Lenahen, who is a Certified Green Professional by the Northeast Florida Builders Association (NEFBA) and the National Home Builders Association (NAHB). “The goal with any home’s landscaping is to implement an integrated and comprehensive approach involving visual beauty, low maintenance, shading, minimal irrigation costs and sustainability.”

The Aurora Custom Homes team implemented the best and latest landscaping practices in its recent custom home project, including xeriscape plantings, tall shade trees, a drip irrigation system tied into an underground rainwater collection cistern, strategically placed bioswales, and installation of permeable surfaces.

“When designing the landscape package for your home, it is important to consult with a landscape architect who will guide you in the implementation of these environmental and cost saving opportunities, as landscaping and lawn maintenance can be a tremendous expense in hotter climates such as Florida,” Lenahen said.

Lenahen offered a breakdown of the landscaping practices used on its most recent custom home project and described the benefits derived from each installation. He noted that each product or design could be used on a home of any size.

- Xeriscaping – The selection of native Florida trees and plants require less watering throughout the year, especially in the hot summer months, while reducing the demand for irrigation. The most popular native Florida species of

trees, shrubs, groundcover, wildflowers and grasses can be found on a listing provided by the County Environmental Planning agency.

- Shade trees – Carefully placed shade trees can shield nearby windows from the transmission of extreme heat into the home during the hot summer months, thereby saving air conditioning costs. Likewise, when designed around an outdoor living space, they can provide a comforting area of shade.
- Drip Irrigation Systems – Drip irrigation, as opposed to spray head irrigation, saves water by applying irrigation directly to the base of each plant or tree. Installed through a network of pipes close to the surface of the soil, a drip irrigation system distributes water slowly over an extended period of time thereby maximizing the water's efficiency while reducing the amount of water lost to evaporation and runoff.
- Underground Cisterns – The use of an underground cistern, when connected to the full perimeter gutters and downspouts, captures all of the rainwater from the roof into a holding tank for use as the primary source of irrigation for the lawn and plantings, thus eliminating the use of costly water from the utility company.
- Bioswales – Bioswales are landscape elements designed to capture the flow of surface water, thereby reducing the run-off of fertilizer and contaminated water into the storm drainage system or nearby lakes and lagoons. They consist of a drought-tolerant ground cover installed over a rock-filled French drain.
- Permeable Surfaces – Using decorative sand-set concrete pavers for driveways, patios and pool decks, in lieu of poured concrete, allows percolation of water into the ground, reducing the amount of water run-off into the storm drainage system and waterways.

“By utilizing the best practices of landscape design, homeowners are able to reduce the maintenance of their landscaping while conserving water,” Lenahen said. “I encourage all homeowners, no matter the size of their home, to consider the benefits of environmentally friendly landscaping and what it can mean for their energy consumption and monthly utility costs.”

To learn more about xeriscaping and eco-friendly landscaping designs, contact Aurora Custom Homes at (904) 246-5400 or visit www.AuroraBuilders.com.