



**For immediate release:**

April 12, 2007

**For more information, contact:**

Julie Maas, Public Relations Specialist  
Office of the State Engineer  
(505) 765-2011

Patti Bushee, Public Outreach Administrator  
Water Use and Conservation Bureau  
(505) 827-3838

**CONSERVATION CORNER: CHOOSING A WATER-WISE LAWN**

submitted by the Office of the State Engineer's Water Use and Conservation Bureau

**(SANTA FE, New Mexico)** -- Substituting a high-water use lawn with a more water-wise native grass employs the basic xeriscaping principles to save the average homeowner precious time, money and water.

During the peak summer months, on average over half of the water consumption occurs outside the home largely due to the water applied to lawns. Most lawn grasses are not native to New Mexico. Therefore, they require a lot of additional water to survive in the hot, dry climate. For example, Kentucky Bluegrass uses 40 inches or more of water each season to stay green and healthy, while the statewide average rainfall is 13 inches per year.

In recent years, many New Mexicans have been rethinking the concept of lawns. Many have seen the wisdom in reducing the size of a typical turf area and substituting drought-tolerant native grasses or water-wise groundcovers and shrubs for water-thirsty turf grasses. A smaller, more water-efficient lawn can cut outdoor water use in half and free the homeowner from the hassle of frequent mowing.

It is important to distinguish between warm season and cool season grasses. Warm season grasses will be brown and dormant during the winter months and green in the summer. Cool-season grasses are green longer, growing vigorously in the spring through fall, retain some color all year long, and require much more supplemental water and fertilizers to sustain the lengthy period of growth that keeps it so green and lush.

Two warm season grasses are generally recommended for our climate---Buffalograss and Blue Grama. Buffalograss is the most water thrifty of all and is low-growing, so it doesn't need mowing. It spreads by surface runners (called stolons) and seed. Blue Grama is a little taller and produces a seed head that requires mowing a few times a season. Blue Grama establishes itself faster than Buffalograss, so the two species are often combined to quickly form a drought-

tolerant lawn, sometimes called "summer lawn blend." Once established, Buffalograss needs only two inches of water per month. Blue Grama will need watering only about once a week during the hottest summer months. Both of these grasses can be planted after the last frost in the spring or before the first frost of the fall, and need little or no fertilization.

Bermuda grass is another warm season grass that uses about two-thirds as much water as bluegrass. Bermuda grass and most native grasses have roots that grow twice as deep as those of Bluegrass, making them more drought-tolerant. It is green in the summer, dormant and brown in the winter. Caution is advised when planting this grass due to its invasive nature. Some consider it to be a weed.

Tall Fescue is a deep-rooted, cool-season grass that needs less frequent watering than Bluegrass, but uses far more water than Buffalograss or Blue Grama. Tall Fescue is sturdier than Bluegrass, tolerates more shade, greens up in the spring and stays green into the late fall.

Local nurseries can recommend what fertilizer is best for the selected grass type. Fertilize warm season grasses (Buffalograss, Blue Grama, Bermuda) in early and late summer. Fertilize cool season grasses (Bluegrass and Fescue) in the spring and fall.

Lawns are often given up to three times more water than is necessary for healthy growth and maintenance. It is important not to over-water or water below the root-zone since plants can only use the water their roots can reach.

# # #

616 total words