

Marketing water savings

Cities, groups promote landscape management, water conservation programs

With rapid population growth and the memory of the worst drought in 50 years, cities and groups are promoting programs that educate their constituents about water quality, water conservation, and landscape management.

Many cities are partnering with federal and state agencies and universities to develop new programs or market existing ones.

In North Central Texas, the city of McKinney and Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Urban Solutions Center at Dallas recently began partnering to develop water conservation programs for McKinney (see story on page 14). Fort Worth is working on an educational plan with Dallas Water Utilities and the Tarrant Regional Water District.

In addition, Dallas has its Save Dallas Water (<http://www.savedallaswater.com/>) campaign that strives to raise awareness about water conservation by educating local citizens to encourage conservation at all levels of the community. The main goals of its water conservation program are to extend the life of existing water supplies, reduce water waste, and reduce per capita consumption.

“Texas SmartScape®,” a program developed by multiple partners in North Central Texas, educates citizens about the ecological, economic, and aesthetic benefits of using landscaping plants, shrubs, grasses, and trees that are native or adapted to the regional climate and local conditions. The program uses an interactive “how to” web site (<http://www.txsmartscape.com/>) and seminars to teach

citizens how to design and care for a garden planted with plants, shrubs, and trees that thrive in the area and need less water. In 2005, SmartScape® expanded to West Texas.

In Central Texas, Austin, known for its progressive approach to conserving the environment, is promoting programs addressing water quality and quantity.

“Grow Green” (<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/growgreen/>) is a comprehensive landscaping program designed for Central Texas. The program, a partnership between Austin and Texas AgriLife Extension Service, gives “earth friendly” gardening solutions to reduce water pollution.

Austin is also tailoring a water conservation program, developed for the Texas Water Development Board, to the city’s needs. The campaign, “Water IQ: Know your water,” educates people about their water source. It offers simple tips to help save water and change the way Texans use water in their homes and businesses. The Lower Colorado River Authority and Austin have collaborated in this campaign and are using ads, billboards, a web site (<http://austin.wateriq.org/>), and other outlets to inform their citizens about how to curb water use.

The city of Lubbock with the High Plains Underground Water Conservation District No. 1, and the North Texas Municipal Water District, are also adapting the Water IQ program to their areas.

The El Paso Water Utilities’ water conservation department, created in 1991, has ongoing





Many cities are promoting landscape management and water conservation practices with their citizens. This garden demonstrates the EARTH-KIND principles of environmentally tolerant, low water use ornamentals.

public information programs and materials that increase awareness about regional water issues. The company recently opened the TechH2O, a water resource learning center with 16 interactive exhibits on water management. The center will provide meeting places and resources to promote the understanding and study of water and water issues to educators, students, policy makers, and the public.

For the Upper Texas Gulf Coast, a group of partners has developed "WaterSmart," a water education program with an interactive web site (<http://www.watersmart.cc/>). Its goal is to educate citizens on producing beautiful landscapes while using less water, fertilizers, and pesticides. The WaterSmart program provides information about runoff pollution and water conservation to homeowners, garden clubs, environmental groups, and city planners. Organizations that developed the

web site include the Galveston Bay Estuary Program of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Coastal Watershed Program, AgriLife Extension, Texas A&M Sea Grant College Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

AgriLife Extension, Texas Nursery and Landscape Association, and Texas Water Development Board recently developed a Texas Urban Landscape Guide. The publication and its web site (<http://urban-landscapeguide.tamu.edu/>) are resources of science-based information on designing, installing, and maintaining WaterWise landscapes in Texas. (A WaterWise landscape is a landscape designed and maintained according to basic good horticultural principles that allow for a beautiful healthy landscape with minimal supplemental irrigation



and no adverse runoff from the landscape property.)

Dr. Don Wilkerson, AgriLife Extension horticulturist and one of the urban guide developers, said the guide targets three audiences—homeowners, horticulture professionals, and municipal government and water utility personnel. It provides different tracks of information for each audience, with each

track containing resources and links to different web sites with specific information for the target audiences.

The TCEQ debuted its “Take Care of Texas” (<http://www.takecareoftexas.org/>) program in April 2007. In addition to water quality and quantity and air quality, it addresses energy conservation and waste reduction. 💧



EARTH-KIND promotes environmental stewardship

EARTH-KIND, Texas AgriLife Extension Service's Department of Horticulture landscape management program, promotes research-proven techniques to provide maximum gardening and landscape enjoyment while preserving and protecting the environment. The program is used throughout Texas by AgriLife Extension, Master Gardeners, and others.

A recent addition to its web site is the "EARTH-KIND Challenge," an online quiz that tests people's knowledge of EARTH-KIND principles. This 25-question quiz asks for input about topics such as landscape design, plant selection, efficient irrigation, and insect and disease management. The quiz then generates a personalized score to show the person taking the challenge how well his or her garden is sustaining a healthy environment.

Dr. Don Wilkerson, AgriLife Extension horticulturist, said if the person is using anything

other than the optimal EARTH-KIND practices, the challenge will then suggest changes in landscape practices. It will also provide additional information, including

links to AgriLife Extension publications on related topics. The quiz is available at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/EarthKind/EKChallenge.html>.

Its web site also contains the "EARTH-KIND On-Line Master Gardener Training Program" that enables Master Gardeners to receive special certification in its environmental stewardship program.

EARTH-KIND recently partnered with the Texas Water Resource Institute to increase the public's and specific stakeholders' knowledge of environmental stewardship of urban landscapes and water resources. 💧



Water education curriculum targets children

The National Junior Master Gardener (JMG) program recently developed a water education program specifically targeted to children. "Operation W.A.T.E.R.: Dr. Thistle Goes Underground" is a horticulture and environmental science curriculum for sixth to eighth grade students.



The curriculum consists of group and individual activities that teach important concepts about soil and water, said

Lisa Whittlesey, Texas AgriLife Extension Service program specialist and National JMG coordinator. The program can be used for a school class, JMG club, 4-H program, kids gardening group, or individual study.

Topics in "Operation W.A.T.E.R." include soil texture, aquifers, watersheds, wetlands, soil nutrients, the water cycle, soil improvement, soil structure, and water and soil conservation. An integrated web site (www.jmgkids.us/) for students is a part of the curriculum.

"Students will learn about important concepts of soils and water as they work together on a mission to foil the newest plans of the villainous character Dr. Thistle," Whittlesey said. "It's a novel and engaging way to connect with these students."

"It should be very popular for teachers in that it addresses important issues for Texas, is correlated to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, and is a great fit for both school and after school programs."

The program is seeking groups to sponsor training workshops to educate teachers and youth leaders about using this curriculum. To order a copy of "Operation W.A.T.E.R.," call toll free at 877-900-2577 or go online to www.jmgkids.us. 💧