

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

SmartScape landscapes fare better during drought



During last year's drought, North Central Texas homeowners using Texas SmartScape® landscapes fared much better than homeowners with traditional landscapes when cities in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex imposed water restrictions.

“Traditional landscapes suffer a great deal more than Texas SmartScape® landscapes,” said Dotty Woodson, Tarrant County Extension horticulture agent. Texas SmartScape® is an educational program intended to help homeowners design and maintain attractive landscapes using native or adapted plants that require less water.

Woodson said by using the program's principles “people can have beautiful, sustainable landscapes even while water restrictions are in place.”

Texas SmartScape® has joined Tarrant Regional Water District (TRWD), The Texas A&M University System's Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Dallas and other partners in an urban water education initiative, part of Governor Rick Perry's Trinity River Basin Environmental Restoration Initiative (see accompanying story).

Texas Smartscapes® complements the Water IQ program used by the North Texas Municipal Water District and e-Life, the environmental education program sponsored by North Central Texas Council of Governments, Environmental Protection Agency, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and KTVT-TV CBS 11.

Texas SmartScape® staff trains Master Gardeners to present educational seminars to individuals, civic organizations, homeowner associations and others. With the drought and corresponding water restrictions, interest in the program increased over the last year, Woodson said.

Many cities proclaim March as Texas SmartScape® month to heighten awareness about the program. This year's theme, "Keep Your Green" highlights the cost benefits of using native and adapted plants that

use less water and less fertilizers to thrive in our local climate. Throughout the region, events will teach the "how's" and "why's" of SmartScaping.

The SmartScape® Web site (<http://www.txsmartscape.com/about.asp>) is an interactive "how to" guide that walks viewers through the SmartScape® concept. Using the Web site, viewers can search for more than 200 plants, shrubs and trees that thrive in North Central Texas and learn how to care for them in a manner that saves time and money.

The ultimate goal of the program, Woodson said, is to conserve local water supplies and improve stormwater runoff quality by reducing the amount of water needed to maintain landscapes while decreasing the amounts of pesticide, fertilizer and herbicide used in landscaping plants.

Woodson said the program addresses how individuals can make a difference. “Individuals can't do anything about the millions of dollars needed for more water resources,” she said, “but Texas SmartScape® provides something every individual with a landscape can do.”

Texas SmartScape® was initially created in 2001 through the leadership of the North Central Texas Council of Governments. Other agencies involved in the project are the Tarrant County Health Department, Texas Cooperative Extension, TRWD, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Weston Gardens. The program Web site was developed in 2003 through sponsorship from Dallas Water Utilities, City of Irving, North Texas Municipal Water District, TRWD and the Upper Trinity Regional Water District.

