



HORTICULTURE

Environmental Stewardship Programs:

Welcome to this E-dition of EARTH KIND NEWS. This newsletter is prepared exclusively for Extension Professionals to support programs in Environmental Stewardship - Horticulture.

February, 2005

In this E-dition...

Each month we will feature ideas and examples of successful extension educational programs dealing with horticulture and the environment. In addition, we'll provide information and curriculum materials to assist in establishing similar programs in your area.

In this first issue, Michael Womack, Nueces CEA-Hort describes their successful plant labeling program designed to provide valuable information on resource efficient plants in the landscape.



EXTENSION HORTICULTURE

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Earth Kind NEWS...

Environmental Stewardship is the primary focus of educational activities within the TCE-Horticulture program. Our "Earth Kind" emphasis focuses on conserving and protecting natural resources through the use of environmentally friendly practices.

The 5 year goals for the TCE Earth Kind - Horticulture project are to assist urban and rural clientele:

- ✓ Reduce water consumption by 25%
- ✓ Reduce the volume of chemical pesticides used by 20%
- ✓ Reduce the amount of fertilizers reaching surface and groundwater by 25%
- ✓ Reduce air and noise pollution by 15%
- ✓ Reduce the volume of horticultural wastes entering landfills by 25%

There are countless ways in which TCE is addressing the important issue of environmental stewardship. Be sure to check out our Web site for a list of curriculum materials available to support the Earth Kind - Horticulture project:

EarthKind.tamu.edu

In March 2003, Texas Cooperative Extension played a leading role in Xeriscape Corpus Christi to launch a new purple waterwise plant label program in local garden centers. The bright purple label says “I’m a Water-Wise plant recommended by Xeriscape Corpus Christi” along side a water drop with the Xeriscape logo inside. These labels were designed to help uninformed garden center customers make better plant selections at local garden centers. Xeriscape Corpus Christi members realized that although many different plant lists were available that provide information to home gardeners, the average person shopping in garden centers often doesn’t do a lot of homework prior to purchasing plants and may not recognize plants in the garden center that were on recommended plant lists. Many purchases are impulse buys. The label allows customers to easily identify proven performers for South Texas Landscapes that are not only water-wise upon establishment, but also insect and disease resistant.



To publicize the program, a 30 second Public Service Announcement was developed and aired on local network and cable stations. A radio advertisement was also developed to saturate the media. Local garden clubs and the Fall and Spring Home and Garden Expos provided venues to give promotional talks about the label campaign and show examples of water-wise plants.

The City of Corpus Christi Water Department underwrote the project making it completely free to local businesses. Participating nurseries received the 2" X 3.75" purple labels to attach to nursery signs. They also received a banner with the seven principles of Xeriscape to display in their business. A colorful sheet featuring the purple label and listing the common and scientific names of the plants was also developed and provided to nurserymen. In order to participate, nurseries had to sign a contract agreeing to only display the label on plants that were designated by Xeriscape Corpus Christi. Additional plants may be petitioned for inclusion.

Survey results from the last two Home and Garden Expos show that over two-thirds of the respondents were familiar with the program and most of those said it did influence their decisions at the garden center. Even more important was that 94% of respondents that have bought purple-label plants have had success with their selections, leading to additional purchases of purple-labeled plants and recommendations to friends.



The program has provided multiple benefits to Extension. The most obvious is the visibility that developed from being featured on the PSA as the local extension horticulturist. They have also included the TCE logo on the plant lists and in the PSA materials. The partnership with the Water Department has been strengthened due to the intensity of this endeavor and has resulted in additional support in other horticultural programming.

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This program did not develop overnight. Water conservation has been a critical issue in Corpus Christi for over 15 years resulting in the formation of as the Corpus Christi Xeriscape Coalition in the early 1990's which changed its name to Xeriscape Corpus Christi in 2002. This group brought together citizens, municipal departments, and agencies including Extension and Master Gardeners to educate the public on landscape water conservation; their major project was the development of an award-winning, free public demonstration garden. The Xeriscape Learning Center and Design Garden located at the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History was opened in 1994 and has been a great demonstration of practical application of the principles of water conservation in a way that can be beautiful and lush, not simply rocks and cactus. Visitors can then take home ideas to implement in their landscapes to create not just a water-wise landscape, but an Earthkind landscape that also minimizes environmental impacts from fertilizers and pesticides.

For more information on this Earth Kind program contact:

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Earth Kind NEWS...

You can learn more about the TCE-Horticulture, Earth Kind project by visiting our Web site <http://EarthKind.tamu.edu>. You can also access information on the Earth Kind Action Plan and Evaluation Instrument at <http://futuresforum.tamu.edu/datasummit/index.htm>

We also encourage you to assist us in determining your Professional Development needs in horticulture by participating in YES! (You, Extension and Success) This competency-based professional development system has been developed for employees of Texas Cooperative Extension and the Cooperative Extension Program at Prairie View. Through YES!, Extension employees will achieve professional growth and success that will enhance their ability to provide quality, relevant outreach and education programs and services to the people of Texas. Check out the YES! Web site for more information <http://extensionlearning.tamu.edu/yes.htm>