

K-State Research and Extension Supports Healthy Yards and Communities

The Situation

Families and communities are becoming increasingly concerned with environmental issues close to home — in their yards, schools, parks, and communities. Yet many are unaware of how their landscape and lawn care techniques affect the environment. Recent drought conditions reinforced the need to educate homeowners on landscaping practices.

What We Did

A team of K-State Research and Extension agents and specialists from across the state developed the Kansas Healthy Yards and Communities program with an emphasis on the following nine healthy yard strategies:

- Build and Maintain a Healthy Soil
- Right Plant, Right Place
- Water Wise
- Mulch
- Grasscycle and Compost
- Fertilize
- Managing Yard Pests
- Stormwater Runoff and Pollution/Water Quality
- Songbirds and Butterflies

An interactive website, www.kansasgreenyards.org was developed featuring:

- a Healthy Yards Assessment tool (developed in collaboration with industry stakeholders),
- research-based information pertaining to all nine Healthy Yard Strategies, and
- a series of 266 gardening videos.

Agents in every local unit used toolkits with promotional materials and a PowerPoint presentation in programs and events focused on healthy yards.

Outcomes

Program participants increased their overall awareness of environmental concerns regarding

landscaping practices and have reduced water use by:

- replacing cool-season turfgrass with warm-season turfgrass,
- installing efficient drip irrigation,
- testing lawn and garden soil for nutrient levels to reduce excessive fertilizer applications, and
- selecting and placing plants suited to the local environment.

Perhaps the star of the Kansas Healthy Yards and Communities program has been the video series. To date, the KSRE Videos YouTube channel has posted two playlists (out of 15) offering more than 10 hours of viewing. Of the more than 1.8 million video views on the channel, more than 1.5 million (82%) are attributed to our gardening content. This is significant, considering that only 32% of the 834 videos on the site are about gardening. Most popular are *Caring for Knock Out Roses*, 112,422 views; *Growing Vegetables in Containers*, 73,246 views; *Self-Watering Planter Saves Time*, 70,437 views; *Common Tomato Problems, Part 1*, 56,256 views; and *Tips for Growing Blueberries*, 51,753 views.

Success Stories

A Douglas County business decided to change its fertilizer line to offer more high-nitrogen fertilizers and fewer fertilizers that contain phosphorus.

A Riley County program participant stated: “The main point I took to heart was that I have probably been overwatering . . . I watched my watering more carefully this summer . . . helped with the good rains (until recently) . . . I believe your program did help, and I will continue to be cognizant of this.”

Contact

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