

OUR MOST PRECIOUS NATURAL RESOURCE Beth Turlington

On Saturday October 1, the Wichita County Master Gardeners hosted Living Well With Less Water in Texoma 2011, at the Multi Purpose Events Center.

I must thank our sponsors, Barry Mahler, Books-A-Million, Charlie Carr Texas Tree, Fidelity Bank, First National Bank of Byers, Grant Barry, Jackie Godwin, James Lane Air Conditioning and Plumbing, Mike Morris State Farm Insurance, Posada Pots, R. J. Ford Inc. Rolling Plains Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists, Smith's Gardentown Farms, State National Bank of Texas, Union Square Federal Credit Union, Water Works of North Texas, Wichita Horticulture Committee and Wichita Valley Landscape.

This daylong conference focused on our water resources and things we can do to help conserve and use those resources in an efficient way.

We began the day with KFDX 3 Meteorologist Bryan Rupp discussing our changing weather patterns and what we can expect in the future. In a nut shell, we will have less rainfall in the coming years and warmer temperatures. Brian spent a great deal of time explaining the science behind these predictions, along with what the people at NOAA, the USDA, the National Weather Service and other agencies are seeing as our future weather patterns. As gardeners, we have to learn to plan and plant with this information in mind.

Scott Calhoun, who lives and works in Tucson, AZ as a landscape designer, discussed what it takes to garden in a desert setting. Cactus and succulents dominate the planting choices along with extremely tough drought tolerant perennials and wild flowers. There is a very strong possibility we could have these same types of gardens in our long range future.

Michael Parkey, a landscape architect from Dallas focused on 25 drought tolerant native plants for Wichita County. From Post Oaks to Indian grass, there are trees, shrubs, grasses and flowering perennials that are more than suited for our climate, that require minimal water, maintenance and still provide for a beautiful and often times stunning landscape.

Rain Gardens and Why We Need Them came next. While that may sound odd considering the drought conditions, Kevin Gustavson of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Blue Thumb Program, explained the benefits and beauty of these gardens. By capturing rainwater from even the smallest of storms, the plants and soil help filter pollutants, which allow cleaner water to reach the streams and waterways. Once established, a rain garden will not need any extra water during normal dry spells. Keeping rainwater from running down roads into the storm drains helps reduce the amount of road oils, chemicals and debris from going into our watersheds.

Finally Dotty Woodson of Texas AgriLife Extension Service spoke about landscape water conservations practices and what as home and business owners we can do to reduce waste.

If you have an irrigations system, always have it checked annually by a professional to be sure it's performing correctly. Consider having the older pop-up heads replaced with newer more efficient ones. Always check to be sure water isn't being wasted, running down the road when your system is on.

Drip or low volume irrigation is the most efficient way to get water where it needs to be without waste. There are a host of product choices, in a wide range of prices to fit any budget. Always add 3 inches of mulch on top of your soaker hoses to help retain moisture in beds and vegetable gardens.

I really like the quote from Bryan Rupp's presentation "I encourage everyone to move past debate and discussion on why things are changing and accept it. The discussion should be focused on 'adapting' to the changes, otherwise the changes will overtake our ability to deal with it and the only option will be to leave". It truly sums up what we as a people have got to do for our future well being, gardener or not.

Please contact the Wichita County Extension Office, 716-8610 if you would like information on this critically important subject.