

RELEVANCE

Williamson County is growing into a highly populated, suburban county. In 2022, the population has grown to more than 630,000 people in the county. Many of the new residents have moved from other states or regions of Texas, and they are not familiar with good horticultural practices for lawns and gardens in Central Texas.

The Horticulture Program Area Committee has identified the new “transplants” as an emerging audience for lawn and garden related programs.

Horticulture programming in Central Texas

As the population expands and new homes are built in Williamson County, the demand for horticulture programming will continue to grow. Topics such as water conservation, integrated pest management, and good plant selection are important to meet demands on the water supply, reduce pesticide use, and become good stewards of the environment.

RESPONSE

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Many residents in Williamson County express interest in in-depth gardening classes like the Master Gardener program, but they are not ready to commit to the volunteer program. The Lawn & Garden Series offered great horticulture training to residents who wanted to learn more about gardening in Central Texas.
- The program was also advertised to residents who are new to Central Texas to introduce them to growing conditions in our climate and Earth-kind plant selections that grow well in Williamson County.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATORS

- Guest speakers for the program included the Texas A&M Forest Service, Williamson County Master Gardeners, and a Travis County Master Gardener.
- The Williamson County Master Gardener Volunteers assisted with program registration, snacks, and clean-up.

VALUE STATEMENT

Earth-Kind Landscaping

The Earth-Kind® program teaches participants how to care for gardens and landscapes with environmentally friendly, research-proven techniques. Instructional topics include water conservation, responsible fertilizer application, and non-chemical options for controlling pests. Use of Earth-Kind® practices benefits Texas by saving water and protecting surface and groundwater resources from potential contaminants.



RESPONSE

The Williamson County Horticulture Extension Agent worked with the Master Gardener Volunteers and the Horticulture Program Area Committee to identify topics and speakers that are relevant for new residents in Williamson County. The Lawn & Garden 101 and 201 series were offered on Tuesday evenings at the County Extension Office from 6:00 - 8:00pm to reach a wider audience.

- **Lawn & Garden 101: February 1 -March 15**
- **89 program series participants**
 - Week 1: Lawn Care
 - Week 2: Vegetable & Herb Gardening
 - Week 3: EarthKind Landscaping
 - Week 4: Trees & Shrubs
 - Week 5: Ornamental Plants & Succulents
 - Week 6: Irrigation Basics & Water Conservation
 - Week 7: Top 10 Garden Mistakes and Q&A Panel
- **Lawn & Garden 201: August 30 – September 20**
- **74 program series participants**
 - Week 1: Fall Vegetable Gardening
 - Week 2: Compost
 - Week 3: Growing Fruit & Nuts
 - Week 4: Tree Diseases & Care

“Excellent class. I’m hoping this will help me have more success with my lawn and garden beds this year.”

“Having limited gardening practice before retirement and being new to area/state of Texas, I really appreciated the full curriculum. Love the Earth-Kind emphasis. All instructors were approachable for extra questions and help.”



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Evaluation Strategy

A retrospective post survey is used at all programs to measure knowledge gained, customer satisfaction, and intention to adopt best practices. This survey asks participants to rank their level of knowledge about topics before the program and after the program on a scale of one to four, with one being poor and four being excellent, and the survey asks participants to indicate their intention to adopt best practices on a five-point scale of “definitely will not” to “already adopted.”

RESULTS

Your understanding of...	Mean before	Mean after	Percent increase
How to plant fruit trees properly	1.7	3.5	61.0%
Using irrigation to adequately water fruit trees	1.5	3.4	63.7%
The three-cut method for pruning trees	1.7	3.7	67.7%
The best place to make a pruning cut	1.9	3.8	63.3%
How to solve compost issues	1.6	3.3	55.7%
When to plant vegetables in Williamson County	2.0	3.5	49.3%
Using cycle and soak irrigation to conserve water	2.1	3.3	40.3%
Your intention to adopt...	Probably will	Definitely will	Already adopted
Using drip irrigation to conserve water	23%	21%	29%
Using compost and organic matter to build healthy soil	22%	31%	39%
Using a soil test to determine fertilizer needs	32%	22%	15%

Summary

The Lawn & Garden Series held in the Spring and Fall 2022 were very popular! Participants indicated that they enjoyed the speakers and learned more than they expected. The series covered a wide variety of topics relevant to homeowners in Williamson County, whether they were interested in lawn care, vegetable gardening, or trees. At the end of the program, participants requested the dates for the next series in 2023!

Future Programming

The Lawn & Garden series was immensely popular, and the Horticulture Committee will offer another series in 2023.

The City of Leander has requested a similar program series with a focus on water conservation for their residents.

For More Information:

Kate Whitney

Horticulture Extension Agent
Williamson County

512-943.3300
klwhitney@ag.tamu.edu

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