

RELEVANCE

Williamson County is growing into a highly populated, suburban county. In 2023, the population has grown to more than 630,000 people in the county. The increasing population of Williamson County has led to a tremendous growth in the green industry, including landscaping services, nursery plant production, and retail horticultural sales. The green industry is strongly correlated with housing, and the growth in new homes in Williamson County has led to strong increases in the green industry.

Many of the new residents have moved from other states or regions of Texas, and they are not familiar with good lawn and garden practices for Central Texas. The Horticulture Advisory Committee has identified the new “transplants” as an emerging audience for lawn and garden related programs.

As the population expands and new homes are built in Williamson County, the demand for horticulture programming will continue to grow. City departments for water conservation and environment are increasingly interested in educating homeowners about good management practices to reduce landscape water consumption, landfill waste, and excessive pesticide and fertilizer use. 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

The Williamson County AgriLife Extension Office and the Master Gardener Volunteers plan two educational program series for home lawn and garden topics. The Green Thumbs Up program is hosted each month at the Round Rock Public Library, Cedar Park Public Library, and Leander Activity Center. The Hands-on in the Garden program is an interactive class held in the Master Gardener Demonstration Garden in March – October.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- This program was targeted towards homeowners in Williamson County who are interested in lawn and garden topics. The program is advertised through newspapers, social media, and community calendars.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATORS

- The Williamson County Master Gardener Association provides volunteer leadership and time for educational programs and demonstration gardens.
- Cedar Park and Round Rock Public Libraries and Leander Activity Center provided facilities for educational programs.
- Williamson County supports the demonstration garden at 3151 SE Inner Loop in Georgetown for an outdoor classroom with hands-on learning opportunities.

PROGRAMS

Monthly Series

- **Green Thumbs Up** is held at Round Rock Public Library, Cedar Park Public Library, and Leander Activity Center.
 - September 2022: Building Raised Beds (52 attended)
 - October 2022: Gifts from the Garden (33 attended)
 - November 2022: Winterizing, Protecting, and Watering (42 attended)
 - January 2023: Houseplants (35 attended)
 - February 2023: Spring Veggies – 3 Month Outlook (55 attended)
 - March 2023: Drought Tolerant Plants (65 attended)
 - April 2023: Lawns – It's Complicated (44 attended)
 - May 2023: Water Conservation Through Irrigation (24 attended)
 - June 2023: Herb Gardening (60 attended)
 - July 2023: Shade Gardening (60 attended)
 - August 2023: Fall Veggie Gardening (90 attended)
- **Hands on in the Garden** is held at the Demonstration Garden for hands-on demonstrations.
 - September 2022: Garden Tools & Hardscapes (22 attended)
 - October 2022: Fall Walk & Talk in the Garden (13 attended)
 - March 2023: Ready, Set, Garden! (26 attended)
 - April 2023: Superstar Broccoli: From Seed to Table (19 attended)
 - May 2023: Potatoes, Corn & Blackberries! Oh My! (16 attended)
 - June 2023: Design Opportunities in the Herb Garden (22 attended)
 - August 2023: Imported Red Fire Ants (31 attended)

RESULTS

709 people attended 38 programs held on lawn and garden topics during 2022/23.

- 451 people completed evaluation surveys for Green Thumbs Up Gardening Series. **98.4% of respondents** were mostly satisfied or completely satisfied with the program.
- 79 people completed evaluation surveys for Hands on in the Garden programs. **97.1% of respondents** were mostly or completely satisfied with the program.
- Participants indicated a **94.3% increase in knowledge** about the benefits of choosing Texas Superstar Plants for their landscape after attending the program.
- Participants indicated a **55.7% increase in knowledge** about the proper timing for herbicide applications.
- Participants indicated a **58.3% increase in knowledge** about using the cycle and soak method for efficient use of irrigation water after attending the program.

“Great information! We will save on our water bill and know how to replace parts for our sprinkler system. Thank you for this presentation.”

“I am a new gardener – this was a wonderful, easily understood presentation. Thank you so much!”

“I love it! I am excited to apply what I learned. I definitely look forward to the next event!! Instructors were knowledgeable and friendly.”

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.”

The evaluation survey asked questions about participants’ intentions to adopt best practices. These questions were standardized across all Hands on in the Garden and Green Thumbs Up programs to measure how the programs increased the likelihood of adoption. 392 participants responded to the survey questions throughout all programs in 2023.

Your intention to adopt...	Probably will	Definitely will	Already adopted
Using integrated weed management to reduce herbicide use	23.7%	20.2%	19.9%
Mowing or weeding to control weeds	20.2%	22.7%	35.9%
Using a soil test to determine fertilizer needs	24.1%	21.3%	11.4%
Watering deeply and infrequently to promote healthy grass	22.6%	29.2%	32.2%
Using compost to improve soil	19.6%	36.7%	31.5%
Using mulch to conserve water and prevent weeds	17.6%	35.9%	36.4%
Using drip irrigation to conserve water	16.6%	30.3%	24.1%
Selecting native and adapted plants for Central Texas	20.2%	41.8%	28.3%

Summary

The Green Thumbs Up series and Hands on in the Garden programs offer a wide range of practical classes for lawn and garden enthusiasts. The programs focus on best horticulture practices for Williamson County, and the results of the evaluation surveys demonstrate that participants are increasing their knowledge and plan to make changes to the current practices.



Future Programming

- Green Thumbs Up series will continue in Round Rock and Cedar Park, and it will move to a new location at Hutto Public Library.
- Wilco AgriLife will host a four-part series for Native Texas Landscaping for homeowners.
- Hands on in the Garden will continue with interactive programming.

For More Information:

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