

# TOWN OF FAIRVIEW ENVIRONMENTAL NEWSLETTER

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## Lawn and Garden Best Management Practices

By Ken Schmidt

When passing through the residential neighborhoods and commercial developments that make up Fairview, it is made abundantly clear that our residents take great pride in the aesthetic appearance of their property. Part of what makes Fairview such a special place, is the beautiful landscaping and gardening techniques that our residents embrace. While it is quite clear that these lush landscapes have greatly enhanced the visual appearance of our community, they also have the potential to negatively impact our community by increasing our water usage, introducing contaminants into our drinking water supply, and increasing our solid waste production. In order to assist our residents with mitigating these negative impacts, this environmental newsletter will focus on Lawn and Garden Best Management Practices.

### Green Scaping

The [EPA's](#) Green Scaping program is a holistic approach to landscaping that can improve the

health and appearance of your lawn and garden, while incorporating control measures that exist to protect and preserve natural resources and the environment. Green Scaping will save you time by landscaping with plants that require less care, and it will save you money by reducing water and chemical usage. Green Scaping will protect the environment by conserving water supplies, reducing the use of fertilizers and pesticides, and reducing yard waste. To incorporate Green Scaping into your home landscaping plan, adhere to the following, five easy steps:

1. Build and maintain healthy soil
2. Plant right for your site
3. Practice smart watering
4. Adopt a holistic approach to pest management
5. Practice natural lawn care

### Step 1: Build and Maintain Healthy Soil

Soil improvement is an underappreciated and often overlooked aspect of landscaping. In order for grass and other plants to achieve their full potential, their roots must have sufficient access to

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air and water. Optimal growth will occur when the soil's aeration, drainage and water holding properties meet the needs of the grass and plants that it is supporting. Landscaping soils that retain too much water typically develop root health problems. When these soils are unable to retain water or lack a sufficient oxygen supply, they require more frequent irrigation and will develop root diseases and nutrient deficiencies that will ultimately lead to the plant's death.

Soils that exhibit adequate to excessive drainage will benefit from the introduction of additional organic matter, leading to enhanced water holding capacity in the soil. Soils that exhibit poor drainage will benefit from the introduction of coarse textured compost additives, leading to enhanced drainage and aeration capacity.

In addition to the physical characteristics of the soil, it is also necessary to determine the chemical composition of our soil. Soil chemical composition testing should be conducted, at a minimum, once every three years. A soil test will analyze the pH level of your soil and determine key nutrient (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium) requirements as well. These results will help you determine what soil additives (fertilizer, lime, compost, etc.) you should, or should not add to your soil. Texas A & M University's agriculture department offers mail-in soil testing and analysis services through their soil testing website, <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/>. Over the counter soil testing products can be found in your local lawn and garden stores or in the landscaping section of any big box home improvement center.

### Step 2: Plant Right for your Site

A common mistake made by many aspiring landscapers/gardeners is a failure to plan out their landscaping decisions. In many cases, landscaping choices are made because we saw a plant in the store that we liked or a yard that caught our eye. When we try to incorporate these traits into our lawn or garden, we often find that they may not be ideal for the soil and ecological conditions in our yard. In recognizing this issue, the North Central Texas Council of Governments produced the website, <http://www.txsmartscape.com/about.asp>, to assist home and business owners with landscaping decisions. Texas SmartScape promotes the use of plants, shrubs, trees, and grass that are native to or adapted to our regional climate and local conditions.

The Texas SmartScape program embraces Xeriscape landscaping, a landscaping technique that focuses on reducing water consumption and fertilizer/pesticide usage. The first step in the SmartScape process is to develop a landscaping site plan. In drawing up this plan, you are creating a visual relationship between the various components of your property – structures, living areas, utilities, etc. – and the landscaping. The first step of the site plan process is the creation of a base plan. Begin by sketching a scaled down version of your property boundaries on a piece of graphing paper. Orient your base map by including a north seeking arrow and then sketch all hardscape items such as buildings, sidewalks, and driveways.

Upon completion of the base plan, an inventory of the current conditions on the property can be conducted. Determine the location and height of any utilities – above ground and buried – and begin to account for all existing vegetation.

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Depict plant/flower bed size and label large plants and vegetation as necessary. Indicate general light, soil, terrain, and drainage characteristics on the map as well. Depict wildlife features and depict neighboring property features that affect your property. Using copies of the previously developed base map, current and future use maps can now be created. On the current use map, identify the following areas: public (sidewalks, driveways, etc.), private (patio, deck, lawn, etc.), service (storage areas, a/c unit, garbage cans, etc.), and wildlife (woodlands, open space, ponds, etc.). Utilize your future uses map to depict how you would like to change your current use map for the future.

Using the property inventory and the future use plan, a functional plan can be created. The functional plan is used to identify the functions that you want each segment of your landscaping to perform. This is where you identify areas that you want to screen, areas that need color, areas for fruit producing plants, areas that will support wildlife, etc. The final landscaping site plan will expand upon this functional plan by indicating specific native plants that mesh with the characteristics identified in subsequent steps. Native plants require less water and soil modification, need little or no fertilizer, are less susceptible to pest infestation, and are more tolerant to stressful environmental conditions. Texas SmartScape provides a database of North Central Texas native plants at [http://www.txsmartscape.com/plant\\_search/index.asp](http://www.txsmartscape.com/plant_search/index.asp).

### Step 3: Practice Smart Watering

In an effort to avoid under watering their lawn and garden, many property owners water too frequently and for too long of a duration. Over watering will stunt growth, increase the probability of disease, and attract harmful vectors.

Additionally, over watering leads to increased runoff to the storm water drainage system. This runoff will contain harmful contaminants that will eventually make their way to our drinking water supply. Finally, over watering will significantly increase our water usage. Increased water usage will lead to increased water usage costs and possibly, water shortages.

The EPA has published smart watering practices in an effort to prevent these issues. Some of the techniques that were highlighted by the EPA are listed below:

- Water deeply but infrequently
- Water in the morning to prevent evaporation and disease
- Use compost and mulch to hold water and reduce evaporation
- Use water timers, soaker hoses, and drip irrigation to increase watering efficiency
- Utilize downspouts and rain barrels to collect and distribute rain water to areas of need

### Step 4: Adopt a Holistic Approach to Pest Management

When homeowners identify weed or pest infestations on their property, they typically take action to eliminate the nuisance. In most cases, a pesticide is used to eliminate the threats to their lawn and garden. While this is an acceptable practice, it is important to address the problem using a more holistic approach. This will require homeowners to analyze the source of the problem in order to determine what is causing the nuisance and what techniques could be used to prevent and eliminate it.

In many cases, weeds and pest infestations can be prevented by maintaining healthy soil, properly

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selecting plants, and quickly removing disease riddled plants. Prior to using pesticides, it is important to understand the source of the problem. Many weeds and insects may not actually be harmful, or less invasive techniques may be more effective in reducing the threat that they may pose. If the nuisance can be eliminated without using pesticides, we should take care to utilize these less invasive techniques. If pesticides are needed to eliminate the nuisance, ensure that the pesticide is utilized properly. Adhere to the guidance provided by the pesticide manufacturer and only apply the pesticide to areas where the pest infestation has been observed.

#### Step 5; Practice Natural Lawn Care

For many homeowners, having a lush, green lawn requires frequent mowing, fertilization, and watering. By adopting natural lawn care techniques, these homeowners can actually achieve the same results while doing less work and reducing costs.

Homeowners can significantly improve the health of their lawn and reduce their solid waste production by making some minor adjustments to their lawn mowing practices. During growth periods, lawns should be mowed more frequently and at a higher height. Homeowners should use mulching lawn mowers, as the grass clippings that are deposited on the lawn are digested by organisms and converted to "natural" fertilizer.

If you are going to fertilize your lawn, use natural organic or slow release fertilizers. Apply the fertilizer according to the manufacturer's guidance and avoid application in areas where runoff is likely to occur. Adhere to the smart watering practices highlighted above and utilize overseeding techniques to fill out thin areas in your lawn.

Create a composte pile in your backyard in order to reduce solid waste. Composted materials can be used in landscaping to prevent evaporation and runoff.

## Important Dates

### ENERGY STAR Sales Tax Holiday May 28 - 30

During Memorial Day weekend, Texas shoppers get a break from state and local sales and use taxes on purchases of certain energy efficient products.

The 2011 ENERGY STAR sales tax holiday begins at 12:01 a.m. (after midnight) on Saturday, May 28, and ends at 11:59 p.m. on Monday, May 30 (Memorial Day).

The products qualifying for the exemption are:

- Air conditioners priced at \$6,000 or less
- Refrigerators priced at \$2,000 or less
- Ceiling fans
- Incandescent and fluorescent light bulbs
- Clothes washers
- Dishwashers
- Dehumidifiers
- Programmable thermostats

Additional information concerning this sales tax holiday can be found at

[http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxpubs/tx96\\_1331/](http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxpubs/tx96_1331/).

### Water-Wise Landscape Tour - Dallas, June 4<sup>th</sup>

The City of Dallas and its surrounding cities will be hosting a Water-Wise Landscape Tour on June 4<sup>th</sup>. The Tour will highlight local efforts in the practice of sustainable landscaping and water conservation. Additionally, the Dallas County Master Gardeners will be providing free sustainable landscaping technique classes. The



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classes will cover the following topics:

- Soil Preparation
- Native Plants
- Rain Barrel Techniques
- Rose, Herb, and Butterfly Gardening
- Perennials
- Wildflowers
- Dallas Trees

Locations and timelines for the Water-Wise landscape tours can be found at <http://savedallaswater.com/wwlt/>.



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