

Say It Together: Xeriscape

North Texas wasn't meant to have green lawns

05:18 AM CDT on Monday, June 26, 2006

Maybe Lady Bird should talk some sense into us.

Summer has only started here in thirsty North Texas, and faucets are already at a trickle in some places. Water cops are out in others.

But here we stand, hose in hand, determined to spread whatever amount of water needed to give our landscapes a lush, emerald sparkle.

The reservoirs are dropping and we're planning to dam up more rivers – and this despite many local cities having some of the highest water use in Texas, with well over 200 gallons per person per day.

Someone please talk some sense into us.

Lady Bird comes to mind because of the symbolic potency of her namesake Wildflower Center in Austin, a champion of drought-tolerant native plants. The center is officially merging with the University of Texas, an indication of the growing awareness of Texas' water-scarce environment.

But the Dallas area is not without rich expertise in the subject of adapting our landscapes to the conditions.

Inspiration oozes from Texas A&M's Benny J. Simpson Native Plant Collection in North Dallas. And from the Texas Native Plant Garden at the Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary in McKinney. And from the Dallas Arboretum's Native Plant Collection and the Texas Discovery Gardens at Fair Park.

All suggest ways to put away the hose and let the natives do their thing, from acacias to zampantles, and all the azaleas, daisies, honeysuckles, laurels, mints, and yuccas in between.

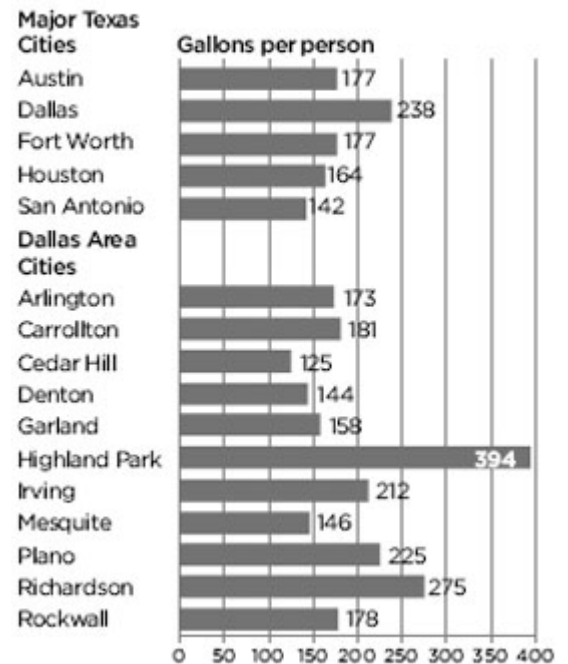
No one would suggest there's a fast turnaround from today's bowling green to tomorrow's xeriscape. It's a process of picking and choosing replacement plants with personality and staying power.

And if anyone needs convincing as they go about mowing and trimming in the yard, let them think about the fact that water use doubles in the summer. For a good look at the culprit, they should look around outside.

It's a thirsty garden we've planted in North Texas, and it's impossible to think we can go on like.

HOW MUCH H2O?

A sampling of gallons used per person per day, according to the Texas Water Development Board.



SOURCE: 2003 Water Use Survey, updated August 2005

Staffgraphic