**Earth-Kind® Can Help You with Your Yard**

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John A. Krogue, Palo Pinto Master Gardener - Intern

We all love beauty. We enjoy the color and the beauty of nature and gardens, but it can be lot of work. Sometimes our efforts with our yards end in frustration in the heat of the Texas summer or high-water bills. You may think: “How can I do it better with less expense and effort?” I mean working in the garden can be peaceful and calming but we all reach our limit. The Texas AgriLife extension Service has spent many years and lots of dollars figuring out what grows in the different zones of Texas and how to make it work in our challenging environment. And the results of this effort are available with the click of the button at their Earth-Kind® website (<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/>).

The goals of Earth-Kind landscaping are saving time and money. Our personal time and our collective time as citizens of the great State of Texas. It is explained in four objectives. Landscape water conservation to conserve this precious resource and to save us money on our water bills. Reducing the use of fertilizer and pesticide to improve pollution issues in the environment, but it also helps our pocketbooks in achieving the beauty we want in our yards.

Landscaping for energy conservation also makes sense in reducing our household power bills and the pollution required to create that energy. If you have driven through the DFW metroplex and seen the growing hills of landfills, the final objective of reducing landscape wastes entering landfills also makes sense.

The wonderful part about this Earth-Kind effort is that each individual can choose from many types, sizes and colors of plants and trees. We don’t have to fill our yard with rock or hardscapes, although a mingling these with green and colorful flowers can be very pleasing. The other great aspect to this effort is that each of us, as homeowners or renters, can apply these principles to our benefit at our pace, and as much as we want. We don’t have to go whole hog into it.

If you want to find out what plants, trees and shrubs are good you can go to the plant selection guide and chose Region B for our part of North Texas. (<http://ekps.tamu.edu/regionsearch?region=zone_b>) At this point if you have a specific plant you want to see enter the information and it will do the search. If you are lazier like me and just want to stroll through the choices, go to the bottom of the page and click on the box “Show Me a Quick List.” You will then be taken to a list that starts with the highest rated plants and find a color and size that fits you and your plans. It will also show you where these plants should be planted.

If you want to know more about a specific plant, just click on it and you will have all the information you require. This will include how large a mature plant will be so you will know the spacing requirements for it in your garden. For those of us that live in the country, a great added feature is that you can also get its Firewise index so that you can plan to reduce wildfire potential around your home.

Earth-Kind would recommend that turf grass take up no more than 10% of your landscape. But if you are a turf lover, that is no problem. There are all sorts of helps available to assist you with the turf grass that you love. It can help you choose a type of turf grass that will tolerate the amount of sun that is going to get, and also one that uses less water to stay green. You can take a soil sample and for a small fee determine exactly how much fertilizer is needed. In trying to maintain a green lawn we often over fertilize which costs us money and can lead to pollution issues with the runoff during rains or overwatering.

You can also learn about different types of sprinkler systems and which types are the most effective. This can apply to those planning a new system, or perhaps retrofitting heads in an existing system. Of course, if you are going to water, the best time to water is right before sun-up. A good reason for having an automatic system so you don’t have to get up that early. It is possible to automate even if you use hoses and don’t have an installed system.

Another good resource available to you is the Earth-Kind Gardening Index where you find a list of articles on many helpful topics such as “Prepare Your Soil,” “Thin is Beautiful,” and “Worm Control.” (<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/archives/parsons/earthkind/ekgarden2.html>)

It is always best to start with a landscaping plan. But this can be as simple as a hand drawn sketch on pieces of paper to assist you in getting a better feel for your landscape use. If you are bold and want an honest evaluation “Take the Earth-Kind Challenge” on the main website listed above. It could be fun. And you can do whatever you want with the results, but it will give you things to consider. Please don’t think that Rome has to be built in a day. But no progress will be made if we don’t take that first step.

If you would like more individual assistance, please reach out to your local county office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service or the Master Gardener’s group that is affiliated with that office. If you prefer on the main website you can go to the bottom of the page and click the button “Ask an Expert.” You will be asked to select Texas, and then you will be able to complete a question form and submit it. Contact us at 940 569-1228 or palo-pinto-tx@tamu.edu.