

In the Shade

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Landscaping for the Future

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American landscapes face challenges for long-term sustainability. At the forefront of those challenges is the conservation of natural resources. Drought, urbanization, invasive species, landscape debris in landfills, air pollution, and the contamination of soil and water all indicate the importance of protecting our natural resources. Texas A&M developed Earth-Kind® Environmental Stewardship to focus on protecting and preserving the environment through a research-based landscape management system.

Research has been conducted at over 40 different public garden sites across Texas and the United States to help increase visibility of the success of Earth-Kind. This systematic approach is focused on the goals of water conservation, pollution prevention, waste reduction, and energy conservation. Principles of Earth-Kind include: proper planning and design, soil analysis and preparation, practical turf areas, appropriate plant selection, efficient irrigation, and appropriate maintenance. The principles and practices of Earth-Kind work together to achieve the highest degree of environmental protection and success in the landscape and garden.

The research program is designed to identify landscape plants that are drought tolerant, adaptable to diverse environments, disease and insect resistant, and beautiful in the landscape. Initially, cooperators chose one of the most challenging landscape plants to test. For over a decade, sites across the U.S. tested more than 100 varieties of roses. The research identified over 20 varieties of drought tolerant roses that do not require fertilizer and pesticides. During the last 10 years, research was expanded to include additional types of plants including perennials, annuals, shrubs, crape myrtles, vegetables, grapes, and ornamental grasses. Overall, the research found that all types of plants, with most varieties, perform at an exceptional level without synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and with very limited irrigation per year.

Our soil is a vital resource that needs to be protected to maintain its health and productivity for the future. The Earth-Kind Soil Management System is a critical component of the success. The research tests the genetics of the plants in the landscape beds prepared with compost, maintained with mulch, and irrigated with drip irrigation. Earth-Kind is a simple approach the public can easily understand and implement. The science behind this approach uses plants with superior genetics in combination with improvements to soil properties,

and encourages beneficial organisms to achieve a balance of nature not typically seen in a managed environment. Learn more about Earth-Kind and visit the gardens: <http://ccmgatx.org/earth-kind-gardening.aspx> . ■

Greg Church, Ph.D. joined the team at Arborological Services in Wylie, Texas, where he serves as a Plant Pathologist and Consulting Arborist. Dr. Church has served as a Plant Pathologist and Horticulturist for Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension and for the USDA Horticulture Research Laboratory in Florida. He has been focused on finding alternative methods for pest and disease control that preserve and protect the environment. During the past decade, Dr. Church led a team of volunteers and collaborators to test a diverse range of landscape and garden plants through the Earth-Kind Environmental Stewardship Program.

