

IMPACT



Ada County, 5880 Glenwood St., Boise, ID 83714; 208-377-2107; Fax: 208-375-8715

Water Conservation Program Builds Awareness

The Situation

Maintaining the typical large-lawn landscapes found in residential, commercial and public sites in Southwest Idaho can require several weekly irrigations. It is estimated that as much as 50 percent of summer household water use is outdoors. In places like arid Boise, Idaho (Ada County), with an average precipitation rate of 11-12 inches per year, using water conserving methods of landscaping would help reduce outside water usage.

Currently the city of Boise, Idaho (population 205,339) enjoys an abundance of relatively inexpensive water, but Boise and the surrounding towns of Eagle, Kuna, Meridian, Caldwell, Nampa, Payette, Emmett, and Mountain Home have grown rapidly in recent years with new subdivisions developing at an alarming rate. Although there is not a water shortage at this time, there are moratoriums on private well drilling in some areas. United Water Idaho, the largest purveyor of water in the region, records 146,700 gallons of water being used annually per residential household.

Fast growth, coupled with limited precipitation gave many arid western cities the impetus needed to consider alternative methods of landscaping and irrigating. Cities like Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Denver, Colorado Springs and Salt Lake City, just to name a few, began encouraging the conservation of water through xeriscaping (water efficient landscaping) in the early 1980's. Xeric landscapes can reduce outside water use by as much as 70

percent. The above mentioned cities have enacted strict regulations on landscape water usage with some offering rebates and/or discounts on water bills for residents who install xeriscapes. Conserving water by xeriscaping did not alter the quality of life in any of these cities. In many cases having water efficient landscapes improved the quality of life by creating beautiful, low maintenance sustainable environments.



Our Response

To improve homeowner awareness on water consumption issues in landscapes, the University of Idaho Extension teamed up with United Water Idaho, the major water purveyor in the region, to develop a 7-week Water Efficient Landscaping Series in 1991. This course provided residents with low water landscape strategies. In 1997 the Boise Public Works Department joined as a collaborating partner.

The educational effort was continued annually for 15 years. The Water Efficient Landscape course covered in detail each of seven principles of xeriscaping: 1) Effective Planning and Design, 2) Soil Improvement, 3) Appropriate Plant Selection, 4) Practical Turf Areas, 5) Efficient Irrigation, 6) Use of Mulches, and 7) Appropriate Landscape Maintenance. Classes were taught by a variety of experts in the region including: University of Idaho Extension faculty and Advanced Master Gardeners, Boise Public Works Department staff, a U.S. Forest Service botanist, a Boise Parks System forester, and commercial green industry professionals specializing in sod production, irrigation installation and nursery

stock. Questionnaires were used to evaluate the course and speakers.

Program Outcomes

Adults Trained: Attendance at the Water Efficient Landscaping (WEL) Series ranged from 80 to 120 participants per class. Attendance summary over a 6 year period is as follows:

2006=526 2003=529
2005=752 2002=735
2004=747 2001=435

Based on the above summary, it is estimated that 9,315 people attended the WEL Series during the last 15 years. Course questionnaires indicated that 98% of participants found the information useful for their home grounds or businesses and 82% indicated that they would implement the knowledge gained.

Water efficient landscaping lectures were also presented to 17 other groups, businesses and organizations in Ada County and surrounding counties by UI faculty including presentations given at the Idaho Mayor's Conference (2001), the Energy NW Regional Weatherization Training (2000), and the 13th Annual Idaho Water and Waste Water Conference (1996). Attendance at these lectures totaled 860.

Other educational spin-offs from the WEL Series were: 1) encouraging a Boise nursery to offer a mini-xeric training for their customers once a year and 2) having the topic of water efficient landscaping added to the University of Idaho (UI) Master Gardener Program curriculum in Ada County 5 years ago. An average of 50 students attended the UI Master Gardener course each year. Within 5 years, 250 students were trained in water efficient landscaping.

A one day mini-training on xeriscaping, in conjunction with a xeric demonstration garden tour was initiated this year.

Mass Media Work: In 2006, United Water (UW) completed 14 weeks of television commercials promoting water conservation in landscapes with Channel 6 KIVI-TV (broadcasting range: 222,490). Ten television and radio interviews were given by UI faculty and UW representatives on xeriscaping.

Susan Bell, University of Idaho Extension Educator, wrote gardening columns on water efficient landscaping for a local newspaper, *The Boise Weekly* (circulation: 90,000) and a local magazine, *The Idaho Business Review* (circulation: 3,500).

Demonstration Sites Established: In 2002, the University of Idaho Extension office in Boise began renovating their office landscape to demonstrate xeric principles for public viewing. Two new xeric demonstration gardens were installed, with a third garden planned for 2007. At the United Water (UW) Idaho office building a xeric demonstration garden was installed in 2006.

The Future

Informative brochures describing the plants used in both the University of Idaho's demonstration gardens and the UW Demonstration Garden are currently being revised and printed. The Water Efficient Landscape Series will continue to be offered annually in Boise, as well as the one day mini-xeric class and garden tour.

Xeric methods of conserving water are slowly starting to be observed in Boise and surrounding towns. Although the population in the region is steadily growing, a surprising reduction in water usage has been recorded by United Water Idaho. For this reason, a survey of past WEL Series participants will be conducted to determine what percent of residents are using water conserving techniques.

For More Information

Susan Bell, Extension Educator-Horticulture
University of Idaho Extension—Ada County
5880 Glenwood Street; Boise, Idaho 83714
208-377-2107; Fax: 208-375-8715
Email: sbell@uidaho.edu

Stephanie Raddatz, Outreach/Education Coordinator
United Water Idaho; 8248 W. Victory Road; Boise, Idaho
83709; 208-362-7336; Fax: 208-362-7069; Email:
stephanie.raddatz@unitedwater.com

Catherine Chertudi, Groundwater & Solid Waste
Programs Manager; Boise Public Works Department;
PO Box 500; Boise, Idaho 83701; 208-384-3901; Fax:
208-433-5650; Email: cchertudi@cityofboise.org