

Demonstration gardens: a way to showcase program concepts implementation

AT A GLANCE

As an additional teaching resource, demonstration gardens provide a visual and hands-on guide for execution of educational principals taught.

The Situation

When teaching classes or doing programming on water conservation and pollinator gardens there can be many misconceptions among participants about how things should be done. Sitting in a classroom and learning how to change a portion of your landscape to be water conscious or pollinator friendly can be somewhat overwhelming. The principles taught are quite simple but lead to some misconceptions on how it works. Those that are most impacted by these misconceptions are participants in the program that are new to the area, do not have much of a gardening background, or want to make a project bigger than they can handle correctly. In the process of implementing the concepts taught, they make the situation worse for pollinators or are not successful with conserving water for long term.

Many individuals become frustrated after these failed attempts and give up on trying to change their situation thus we have not increased habitat and food sources for pollinators or cut down on our water usage, thus leading to a lack of pollination in our gardens and crops and water shortages and waste continuing in our current landscaping. Having a demonstration garden where concepts of implementation can be taught in the



Corner of Native Pollinator Demonstration Garden at the County West Building in Twin Falls.

classroom and then a trip outside to the garden to look at how the concepts discussed in the classroom can be correctly applied. Having a good visual representation of what the final concept of the project should look like and being able to demonstrate and show issues and steps in detail to participants make it easier for them to be successful. To be able to learn the steps to create a beautiful water conservation or pollinator garden and then to see how all the steps come together to create the best results can help participants to be successful in their endeavors to make change.

Working with the county commissioners, county building and landscape maintenance personnel, on a unified effort to make the demonstration gardens benefit to be used as teaching tools can save the county on

maintenance costs or solve issues that they have been dealing with in a section of the landscape. It also provides the county with an opportunity to showcase that they are supportive of the measures and projects that are needed to improve our pollinator habitat and conserve water at the same time is a win-win situation for all parties involved. It can be proposed by the University of Idaho Extension office educator or staff, county maintenance personnel or even the commissioners themselves to look at ways to improve the county's perception regarding being supportive of efforts to conserve water or provide habitat for pollinators.

Our Response

Our county already had one demonstration garden prior to my time in UI Extension. When I was first introduced to the County Commissioners after I began the job, they asked if it was possible for me to create another demonstration garden in a problem spot at the county office building that had become an eye sore to the commissioners. I accepted the challenge as it was a challenging site. It was a bed on the corner of the parking lot that had been neglected and overrun by a weedy perennial plant. To increase the challenge of this location that was surrounded by asphalt and concrete was that there was no water available for this location due to a larger issue. Challenge accepted, I worked with our master gardeners, Steve Love at the Aberdeen Research and Extension Center, and the county grounds maintenance person to clean and spray out the weeds and the perennial plants overtaking the spot. The following year we replanted the spot as a Native

Buckwheat demonstration garden that only is watered by what annual precipitation we get each year. After planting we take water to this location to get these plants established that first summer.

A year later the Advanced Idaho Master Gardener class decided that they wanted to do a native pollinator demonstration garden for their class project. I helped them get some grant funding for this project through the Lunaria Grant with the Idaho Botanical Garden and then another grant from the Idaho Native Plant Society to purchase signage for the three demonstration gardens at the county building. Each of these gardens then became teaching aids when conducting water conservation, pollinator classes, seed saving or presentations. Other groups have used the gardens for educational purposes such as the Twin Falls Pollinator Council, the Local Audubon Society and the Idaho Native Plant Society Local Chapter.

Program Outcomes

Since the demonstration gardens have been installed we have utilized them for multiple classes and programs to showcase as a hands-on way to see how to implement the practices taught in programming. Other groups are using these gardens, and they are open to the public and have been used for several tours and examples of how to use water conservation, native plants, or create pollinator habitat for many individuals. Talks with the county have included putting in a community vegetable garden, small orchard or edible landscaping display.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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