

Lake-Friendly Gardening

Homeowner Education in Whatcom County, Washington

Stormwater pollution is a growing concern for Lake Whatcom, a multi-use lake that is the drinking water source for over 85,000 Whatcom County, Washington residents. A 1999 state report documented multiple urban pollutants, including pesticides used by homeowners, in stormwater drains and tributaries within the watershed (Serdar and Davis 1999). In addition, the lake is listed on the Clean Water Act 303(d) list for low dissolved oxygen due to excessive phosphorus, a component of most fertilizers.



The Lake-Friendly Gardening Kit

Changing residents' yard and garden practices is key to minimizing urbanization's effects on the lake. In 2000, Washington State University Extension – Whatcom County and Whatcom County Water Resources started the Lake-Friendly Gardening Education program with a half-day workshop on soils and compost, integrated pest management, alternatives to turf, and lawn care.

The workshop was well attended, and the following year, Extension and Water Resources rewrote research-based Extension materials in a more engaging style and design, packaging the booklets into the Lake-Friendly Gardening Kit. Coupons for lake-friendly gardening products from local retailers were included.

Results

Three months after receiving the kit, recipients were mailed a written survey. About 50% responded, with these results:

- ◆ 100% agreed the kit was useful.
- ◆ 38% of respondents read the entire kit; 48% read half to most of it.
- ◆ 98% thought the materials were easy to understand.
- ◆ 86% felt they learned how to make their practices more lake-friendly.
- ◆ 52% managed pests differently.
- ◆ 48% purchased pest-resistant plants.
- ◆ 52% changed their lawn care practices.
- ◆ 48% shared what they learned with someone else.
- ◆ 89% recognized the connection between their land use actions and water quality.

Next Steps

In July 2004, Whatcom County Water Resources received a state Centennial Clean Water Fund grant for \$130,000 to expand the education program. New elements will include an annual survey of lakeside residents' understanding of water-friendly gardening practices, a demonstration landscape at a lakeside city park, a video of best water-friendly gardening practices, and trainings for landscapers, nursery staff, and realtors.

Contact Information

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