

LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER - The Turf Lawn Experiment

Note: This article was extracted from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center website.

Using a grant from Wal-Mart, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is in year two of an effort to develop a multi-species turf grass that conserves water, is disease resistant and stands up to foot traffic, while creating the thick, lush lawn beloved by homeowners. Wildflower Center ecologist Mark Simmons has been leading research on a mixture of drought-adapted native grasses that cut down on the mowing, watering, weeding and feeding which is required by non-native lawns.

The research clearly demonstrates that it takes less effort to maintain a lawn of mixed native turf grasses than a non-native lawn. The study draws from knowledge that America's native grasslands include many turf grass species already adapted to our climate and able to coexist as a stable plant community. So far observations at the Wildflower Center test site have shown that the native seed mix outperforms Bermuda grass in terms of rates of establishment, thickness of the turf, mowing rates and weed resistance.

Visitors to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center can see the native turf grass plots which are accessible from the Restoration Research Trail. Also, see more about this project or other conservation and native plant

landscaping on the center's website at www.wildflower.org.

AREA ACTIVITIES: Working with community stakeholders, the Center developed a site master plan as well as plans for education, restoration and management of the 200-acre [Blue Hole Regional Park and Natural Area](#) for the Village of Wimberley.

RAINWATER COLLECTORS – HOW DID THEY FARE?

Representative Patrick Rose says rainwater harvesting... "must be a key component of our state's natural resource conservation and development public policy." At the District, we couldn't agree more. We think this option is a real solution for the drought prone Hill Country and the benefits are vast. Nevertheless, during the drought, the response was often the same.. "That's all well and good, but it isn't raining!"

That's not exactly true. While it didn't seem like much, it did in fact rain and every time it did, rainwater collectors benefitted greatly. Most of the people I interviewed for this article were never below 50% of full capacity and during some rains, they actually exceeded it. And no one I talked to ran completely out of water. This is not a big surprise when as little as 2 in. of rain in a month on a 2,500 sq. ft. collection surface would yield over 2,600 gallons of water. Months with more rain would yield more as surplus. In other words, it really works.

That's why Representative Rose and other supporters will push for legislation to overcome regulatory and practical obstacles pertaining to rainwater harvesting that exist currently in Texas. Primarily, a bill that makes rainwater harvesting the solution for both private citizens and businesses to meet future water needs.

And now? Well, for now it's raining again and the drought has been declared over. We're all breathing a sigh of relief, but what about next time? The District and this reporter will still be singing the praises of rainwater harvesting and offering literature for you to research further. We hope you will and we think you'll be glad you did.

THE ACCIDENTAL COLLECTOR - ONE PERSON'S STORY

When Josh Smith started the building project for his new home outside of Wimberley, he always planned to drill a well. It was part of the budget and on the list of "To-Do's". But as the project pushed forward this budget item began to be pushed out as one thing after another took its place in importance. By the time the home was completed and the well was on top of his list, the cost do the job had increased significantly. That's how Josh ended up at Tank Town talking and learning about Rainwater Harvesting. Before long he abandoned the idea of a well and began to design and implement a system that would become his family's only source of water.

What Josh came to realize was that RW Harvesting is not only affordable and reasonable but truly works -- even during critical drought conditions. With 20,000 gallons of capacity and 3500 sq. ft. of capture area, Josh has found that he has never run out of water. When the system came on line in December, 2002, Josh says he used to get

anxious and would check the water levels constantly.

Since those early days, he has seen several low rainfall seasons, and even during this last critical drought he has learned what they need and how to effectively conserve. Repeatedly, small rains filled his tank to capacity and more. So much so that Josh is now able to "select" when to let the rain start flowing into the tanks. This allows him to minimize or even eliminate debris in the tank filters.

Josh is just one of many stories I have heard since beginning this research, but his success is consistent with them all. Josh never intended to be the voice of Rainwater Harvesting. He didn't start out to be the guy out in front of water shortage and sustainable solutions, but here he is and Josh is actually glad that he kept delaying that well. His story in particular shows that any of us can make this work.

AREA EVENTS of Interest

- [Hays County Water Conservation Working Group met February 23 to begin planning & production for October 9 Rainwater Revival](#)
- [Texas Rainwater Catchment Association Conference March 12-13 @ Hill Country Youth Exhibit](#)
- [Wildflower Days @ Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center March 15 - May 31](#)