

The Greening of

FORT WORTH

by Laura Samuel Meyn

As sustainable practices take root in Tarrant County, there are some real characters leading by example. Here's how we're doing as a city, what some are doing as individuals, and how you can go green without spending a lot of green.

DO YOU THINK COWTOWN IS GREEN? *Popular Science* magazine does: In their "America's 50 Greenest Cities" feature last year, Fort Worth was ranked 15th in the nation, earning its highest rating in the realm of "recycling and green perspective," actually beating out the significantly crunchier San Francisco and Seattle in that particular category. Fifteenth place isn't too shabby for a town that, at the time, didn't have a formal sustainability program in place. But Brian Boerner, director of environmental management for the city of Fort Worth, wasn't all that surprised by the honor. "We have a comprehensive plan that incorporates a lot of these issues," he said, adding that the city council just this spring adopted initiatives to create Fort Worth's first sustainability task force. In fact, it's been brewing for a while.

"Over the past 10 years, the city of Fort Worth has been tooling its focus on a sustainable design, recognizing that the quality of life we enjoy now—we want that to be here for our children, and for our children's children, and for the next 150 to 200 years," Boerner said.

Nowhere is Fort Worth's sustainability effort more evident than in our garbage and recycling program. About seven years ago, the city began a volume-based solid waste effort, meaning if you recycle more, you pay less: That 64-gallon trash can most people use can be swapped out for a 32-gallon model for a savings of \$5 a month (if you've been using a 96-gallon cart, downsizing to the 32-gallon model will save you \$10 a month). "We are empowering the citizen to determine how much they want to pay for garbage; if you can divert as much stuff out of your brown can as possible, you can go to a smaller size can, saving anywhere from \$60 to \$120 a year," Boerner explained. Besides recycling, composting your kitchen scraps with your lawn clippings and leaves can save even more space in your garbage can (turn to page 50 to learn more).

The program is working: Boerner says that the city is now diverting about one-quarter of material picked up at the curb away from the landfill and toward alternative uses—in recycled products, building materials, mulch and more. The ripple effects seem to be endless: Wood chips from branches are sometimes sold to industries to use as boiler fuel. "Instead of burning natural gas or coal, they take wood

chips, putting them into these boilers, and getting the heat off them," Boerner said. "The ash that comes out of there is sent to a composting operation and turned into mulch. Residents can actually get some of that mulch at our drop-off stations free of charge." (Visit timetorecycle.com for the three Fort Worth drop-off station locations that offer free mulch.) And using mulch on your landscaping beds is a natural way to keep water in and weeds out.

Another area we're doing well in, according to Boerner, is renewable energy: "We generate almost half the power that our waste water treatment plant uses," he said. "As a result, our entire renewable portfolio for the city of Fort Worth is about 14 percent, which is tremendous."

Of course, we have areas that need much improvement. "Water conservation is probably one of our biggest opportunities for sustainability," Boerner said. "We are one of the fastest growing cities in North America, and we use a tremendous amount of water." In fact, if we don't change our ways, we'll be forced to make some pricey decisions down the road: If growth continues at the rate that it is now, Boerner estimates that 2025 is the break-even point—when we, um, begin to run out. "We can either build new water sources, which are extremely expensive, or we can use our existing water more beneficially, and that's much more cost-effective," he said. "That's not to say that we're never going to have to find new water sources, but if we can take that from 2025 to 2035, it gives us a much better opportunity to plan."

So what can you do? Well, we all know about big, expensive ways to go green, such as replacing all the windows in your house with more energy-efficient ones or buying a hybrid car. No doubt about it, those are great things to do when the item in question is due for replacement. But there are many ways to go green that cost hardly anything—actions that you can take right now. In fact, the environmentally minded habits we incorporate into our daily lives—like biking to work or composting kitchen scraps—could just as easily be considered budget-minded habits. "It is doing things differently, but it's an action with a purpose; at the end of the day, it does end up saving you money, and it helps the environment, so it's green on both sides," Boerner said. "A lot of people out there are doing a lot of innovative things; that's what's making the difference here in Fort Worth."

The following four crusaders are leading the way by example, showing the rest of us how to incorporate sustainable practices into our daily lives without spending much, if anything. Find your inner eco-geek by following their lead: It'll help the environment, and it'll help save you money, too. Best of all, because these are daily habits rather than a one-time shot, they're sustainable practices that you can really, well, sustain. How's that for going green?

Catching Rain, Conserving Water

DOTTY WOODSON *Extension Program Specialist for Water Resources, Texas AgriLife Extension*

Dotty Woodson wears a lot of hats—the Fort Worth resident is a regional programmer serving 16 counties, after all—but it's her rainwater harvesting workshops all over the DFW area that have taught environmentally proactive audiences, from Boy Scouts to retirees, exactly why it's so important to conserve water. And it's her workshops that have led such locals through the steps to make their own rain barrel out of food-grade containers sourced from a tomato factory in Cleburne. In fact, her workshops alone have put some 650 such rain barrels into residential use locally—and at 55 gallons apiece, those barrels alone potentially collect more than 35,000 gallons of rainwater when the sky opens up over the Metroplex.

If you haven't ever used a rain barrel, the first

TIPS

Save water inside:

Check your faucets and toilets for leaks, and install aerators in your home's faucets to increase spray and save water. Be sure to turn the faucet off when you're brushing your teeth or shaving. Try to shorten your showers to 5 minutes. For baths, plug the bathtub before turning the water on.

Save water outside:

Irrigation is one of the biggest water uses in our area, so take the time to get to know your sprinkler system—and how to override it when it rains. Doty Woodson notes that improperly functioning irrigation systems waste an incredible amount of water, so check it periodically to make sure that it's not leaking.

Car-washing tip: Use a commercial car wash where the sudsy water goes to a wastewater treatment plant, rather than washing your car in the driveway where runoff and polluting detergents will run down the street and directly into a river, lake or stream. If you feel strongly about hand washing, pull your car onto your lawn first so the runoff will water your grass.

In her workshops, Doty Woodson uses food-grade containers from a tomato factory in Cleburne to fashion rain barrels for residential use; students often paint them and put landscaping around them to make them blend into their yards.

time you do, you'll likely be astounded at how quickly it fills up: A hard rain can fill an average barrel in as little as five minutes. In fact, Woodson says that students often come back to another workshop to make a second barrel when they see how quickly their first one fills up. Barrels can be linked together to deal with overflow, and they can be placed at multiple downspouts around your house—or just where eaves meet and water flows off the roof. So what to do with all that water? Save it for a day that's not rainy, and use it on your garden and landscaping. "We're putting expensive, clean drinking water out in our landscapes," Woodson said. "We're recommending rainwater harvesting in Fort Worth to reduce the strain on the municipal water supply."

And Woodson says that reducing the storm water runoff from our properties is really important environmentally speaking, too. "Storm water leaving our properties is one of the largest sources of pollution in the area; it carries fertilizers and pesticides into our creeks, the Trinity River and our lakes," she said. Rainwater harvest-

ing captures that storm water, reducing runoff from your property while also reducing your city water use. Capturing rainwater can also protect your landscaping from the erosion that typically occurs in areas where water flows off our homes.

While rainwater harvesting isn't mainstream by any stretch, it's becoming more common; both commercial and residential builders are increasingly looking at incorporating rainwater collection systems, some underground, into their designs. The motivating forces include general interest in sustainable practices coupled with the humbling revelations that if our area continues to grow at this rate, we'll risk running out of water or facing pricey alternatives in fewer than 20 years.

"In the big picture, if we continue at this rate, we won't have enough water resources," Woodson said. "We want to look at a 30 percent reduction of water use in our homes and outdoors."

Rainwater Harvesting Resources:

- To learn more about local rainwater harvesting, visit rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu. Rainwater harvesting workshops are held regularly through TCU's Extended Education program (lifelong.tcu.edu). To learn more about saving water locally, including current watering restrictions and landscaping ideas, visit savetarrantwater.com.
- To see a demonstration of rainwater harvesting, visit the Fort Worth Botanic Gardens (817.871.7686 or fwbg.org), or the Tarrant County Community Garden run by the Tarrant County Master Gardener Association at the Resource Connection (817.884.1944 or tcmga.org).
- If you want a rain barrel but don't want to make your own, several commercially made barrels are available (though they're much more expensive than making your own). Check with your favorite garden store; Marshall Grain Co. (817.536.5636 or marshallgrain.com) is one company that sells them locally.

Biking to School or Work

KEITH WHITWORTH *Founder, Texas*

Christian University Purple Bike Program

Keith Whitworth never considered himself an environmentalist; in fact, he says he wasn't even particularly aware of the green movement. But that changed one day when the sociology professor was standing at a Texas Christian University crosswalk. "I was waiting for the light to change when a TCU physical plant maintenance truck pulled up next to me, and I was enveloped in smoke," he said. "For some reason, I had this epiphany: I've got to do something to provide a better world for my children."

The next semester, Whitworth began working with his applied sociology class on an ambitious grant-writing project aimed at

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Biking Resources:

- To learn more about the Purple Bike Program, visit purplebikeprogram.com. If you'd like to sponsor a bike, the powder-coated cruisers cost about \$500 each to purchase and customize. (The bikes are intended to last for more than 20 years.)
- Fort Worth has many miles of paved Trinity Trails perfect for cyclists who'd rather stay off the roads; visit trinitytrails.org for maps and more information.
- Need inspiration to ride? Check out the Fort Worth Bicycling Association Web site at fwbaclub.org; they schedule regular recreational group rides for various levels.

TIPS

Other transportation options: If you can't ride your bike or walk to work or school, try taking the bus or carpooling; it saves money as well as emissions. Purple Bike Founder Keith Whitworth rides the bus to TCU from Cleburne and enjoys the time off for studying. Visit the-t.com or call 817.215.8600 for more information.

Conserve energy inside, too: Consider other ways to save energy besides riding your bike. For instance, check your home and office for "phantom" electric use—when something is plugged in (phone chargers, laptop power adaptors), it can drain energy resources even when it's not in use; set up an accessible power strip for ease. Consider changing out your light bulbs for compact fluorescent bulbs, and check out the weather-stripping around your doors to make sure your heating and cooling stays inside.

replacing campus maintenance trucks with cleaner-operating vehicles. They struck out. But when a new crop of students entered his class, they got the idea to create a bike-lending program for students, faculty and staff to encourage those on campus to ride instead of drive. Whitworth and his students spent plenty of time in the research phase, checking out similar programs in Europe and around the US, and carefully considering TCU's needs. In 2006, when they submitted their plans to the TCU-funded Vision in Action grant, they were awarded enough money to launch a test pilot of the program. Since then, the Purple Bike Program has grown from 5 bikes to about 70—and they're all checked out. In fact, there's a waiting list of about 100.

Whitworth says that the program's goal was to be symbolic, prompting the university community to analyze its consumption patterns and daily lifestyle. "The impact is much greater than the 70 bikes we have," he said. "It's a very visible program on campus; it really was a catalyst for TCU to begin evaluating what we can do to be a greener university. Students saw the bikes, they asked about the bikes—it just took off." With a "Think Purple, Live Green"-themed semester that caught the imaginations and impacted the daily habits of students, staff and faculty last fall, there are already more changes afoot at TCU.

The increased use of bikes matters for a number of environmental reasons, the most



Keith Whitworth says that his students realized that for the Purple Bike Program to catch on at TCU, the bikes needed to be cool—bikes just weren't popular on campus at the time. The program's stylish cruisers, professionally powder-coated in TCU purple, have caught on so well that they've inspired students, faculty and staff to bring their own bikes back to campus, too.

obvious being that if you're riding a bike, you're not driving a car. "We all have to drive at some point; if we eliminate a number of miles, we're offsetting some of our carbon footprint," Whitworth said. But beyond that, he says, is the manifestation of thinking green; in other words, if I can ride a bike, what else can I do? "I think for the students, it leads them down that pathway," he said. "It's part of the educational process to introduce them to some of these ideas of sustainability."

Planting a Vegetable Garden

SCOTT FEILLE *Regional Program Director, Real School Gardens*

Growing your own vegetables is a no-brainer for going green: you'll enjoy the delicious results of your efforts, you'll save some trips to the store, and you'll be eating organically for a lot less. Need help? Just ask a local elementary school student—here in Fort Worth, a lot of them already know how it's done, thanks to Real School Gardens. The grassroots organization partners with urban elementary schools to design, install and sustain school gardens that serve as hands-on outdoor classrooms to students all over the Metroplex. Launched in Fort Worth back in 2003, the program now has 57 school gardens in North Texas at such schools as East Fort Worth Montessori, Alice Carlson, Atwood McDonald, David Sellars and Edward J. Briscoe, among many others—in fact, about 10 more are slated to spring up this school year.

Regional program director Scott Feille's involvement began back when he was a science teacher at Fort Worth's Westcliff Elementary; he used the school garden to help make his science lessons come alive, and he noticed how profound the garden's impact was, particularly on children who had a hard time sitting still in the traditional classroom setting. But suddenly they found themselves in their ele-



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ment working with their peers outside.

So what makes Real School Gardens so green? These gardens bring together so many different aspects of sustainable living that it's hard for participants to miss the fact that their daily habits have a direct impact on the world around them. The gardens use rain barrels; they use compost piles, to which the school cafeterias have plenty to add; they demonstrate the wisdom of eating seasonally and organically as children come face-to-face with the growing process. The gardens also emphasize Texas native plants, which local folks are increasingly turning to for landscaping that requires less water, fertilization and pesticide use than plants cultivated for elsewhere.

Feille recalls a demonstration that involved releasing dye into the Westcliff Elementary garden, with a follow-up trip to the creek across the street at Foster Park, where the dye turned up, to show how easily chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides can make their way into the watershed.

"I've had several students say that they don't let their parents throw cigarette butts out the window anymore because it's bad for the watershed," he said, adding that the children don't want litter in their gardens—such is their newfound respect for the green spaces around them.

Besides the greening of their actions is the greening of their diets; children who might not

TIPS

Grow your own: For first-time vegetable gardeners, container gardens are an easy way to begin, and they're a great way to go if you live in an apartment or condominium (you'll need a sunny spot—a patio, balcony or even a window box will do). To start, try growing cherry tomatoes and herbs like basil, chives and cilantro. Come cooler weather, plant baby lettuce.

Go local: Fresh, in-season vegetables usually taste better and often cost less than those shipped from afar. The Cowtown Farmers' Market (817.462.1426 or cowtownfarmersmarket.com) is held Wednesdays and Saturdays on the Traffic Circle at 3821 Southwest Boulevard; visit the Web site for additional locations, including an occasional farmers' market held on the TCU campus.

Support a local farmer: Community supported agriculture (CSA) is an arrangement where people buy a share of a local farm's produce, receiving a box of assorted fresh seasonal vegetables weekly. Texas Prairie Farms (texasprairiefarms.com) has teamed up with Artisan Baking Company to offer a Fort Worth CSA that adds freshly baked breads to the mix, too; a 15-week fall share will include such garden selections as squash, peppers, tomatoes, and then, as the weather cools, green beans, broccoli, sweet potatoes, spinach, carrots, cabbage and much more.

otherwise be interested in vegetables love the produce that they've helped grow (take note, parents of picky eaters). Schools have grown herbs and tomatoes to make pizza sauce; they've grown cilantro and tomatoes to make hot sauce; and others have made salads and soups from their harvest. "We have a local chef, Nehme Elbitar from Chadra Mezza, coming to professional development day, showing teachers things they can cook in the classroom with our vegetables," Feille said. "We're interested in growing vegetables for the cafeteria; we don't have enough produce to support lunch yet, but I know it's something we can do."

Meanwhile, the gardens have fostered a community-minded outlook within the schools: Excess produce is shared with refugee centers and food banks, and some schools have done growing projects for retirement villages. "It's tying into being a responsible human, the bigger picture," Feille said. "What I've noticed is the kids are much more connected, they're learning things that teachers don't even write in the lesson plan."

Real School Gardens and Scott Feille, regional director, are partnering with urban elementary schools to design, install and sustain school gardens that serve as hands-on outdoor classrooms to students all over the Metroplex. The gardens use rain barrels and compost piles and demonstrate the benefits of eating seasonally and organically as children become familiar with the growing process.



Gardening Resources:

- Are you interested in getting involved with Real School Gardens? With dozens of school gardens in the Fort Worth area, there are several sites that can make use of volunteer labor. The organization can use the help of Master Gardeners, those with wind or solar power expertise, to help install water features operated by wind or sun, and office support. Donations are also welcome. To find out more about the program, call 817.348.8102 or visit realschoolgardens.org.
- Wish there were a "Real School Garden" for grownups? Elizabeth Anna's Old World Garden (817.922.0930 or elizabethanna.net) regularly hosts vegetable gardening workshops, often touching on rainwater harvesting, composting and other sustainable life skills that relate to gardening; a Fall Vegetable Gardening Workshop is planned for October. Ladies of the Garden (organicgardeningtx.com) in Arlington hosts organic gardening classes, as does The Organic Garden Club of Fort Worth (ogctw.com), just celebrating its 20th year.
- Make all of your outdoor spaces more sustainable by landscaping with native plants that require less water and no pesticides or fertilizers. Native flowering plants tend to bloom for longer, too. Visit Texas SmartScape at txsmartscape.com for a comprehensive database of native plants to use for landscaping. Weston Gardens (817.572.0549 or westongardens.com) specializes in native and acclimated plants for landscaping, and they have an impressive demonstration garden across the street that you can wander for inspiration.



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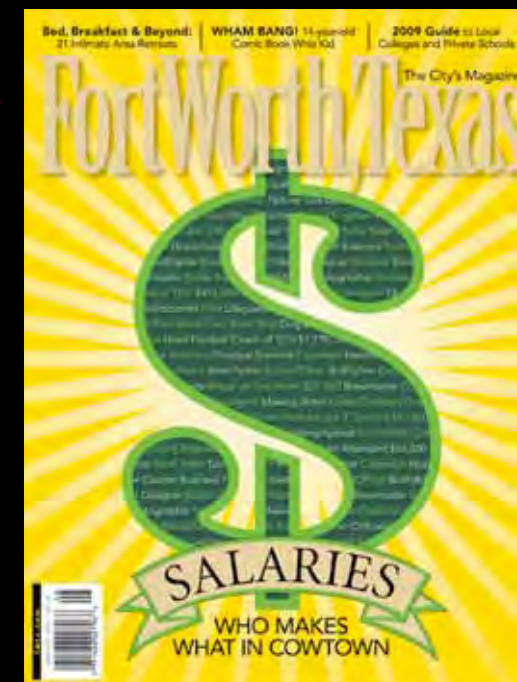
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TIPS

What to compost: Compost isn't just for vegetable and fruit scraps; don't forget to add coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells, grass clippings, garden trimmings and autumn leaves; even rabbit and chicken droppings can be incorporated. Remember that compost will break down faster if material is in smaller pieces to begin with.

Need more green matter for your compost pile? Starbucks (starbucks.com) has a Grounds for Your Garden program: The company bags up used coffee grounds at its retail locations and offers them free to local gardeners; stop by your favorite location and ask.

Even if you're not composting, don't ever bag your leaves in plastic. While those paper yard bags do the job fine, Fort Worth residents can instead opt to purchase a 96-gallon green yard cart (\$75) that the city will empty on a weekly basis for free, turning the contents into mulch or compost. Call 817.392.3279.

Compost Resources:

- To see a demonstration of composting, including backyard-size bins that you can build yourself, visit the Compost Outpost at the Fort Worth Botanic Gardens (817.871.7966 or fwbgo.org). The City of Fort Worth offers tips for composting on its Web site at timetorecycle.com.
- Several North Texas cities offer free or low-cost compost classes. For beginning backyard composters, Fort Worth offers two classes a year at the Fort Worth Botanic Garden; call 817.871.7966 to find

out when the next class will be held. Arlington offers free composting classes the first and second Saturday of each month, from 9 to 11 a.m.; call 817.459.6778. For more advanced composters, Fort Worth and Arlington both offer an annual Master Composter class (mastercomposter.com).

- If you're interested in helping Fort Worth recycle, contact Debbie Branch, the Keep Fort Worth Beautiful Coordinator (817.392.5151 or deborah.branch@fortworthgov.org). Branch, a mas-

ter composting who teaches classes locally, maintains a roster of more than 100 volunteers for the Keep Fort Worth Beautiful Green Team, which helps with recycling efforts at events such as Jazz By the Boulevard and at the Texas Motor Speedway (volunteers gain free admission).

UTA campus composter John Darling helps divert more than 50 tons of campus waste from local landfills each year. As faculty, staff and students catch on, he says, various UTA offices are collecting and bringing him their banana peels, apple cores and coffee grounds to add to the mix.

You take something that was considered waste and was filling up a landfill, and make it into something valuable."

Darling estimates that one-quarter to one-third of the material that's bulking up our landfills could be composted instead. Meaning, if diverted, it would break down into a rich soil-like substance. In fact, such compost is considered by gardeners to be pure gold: It's a soil amendment that makes plants healthier by adding scores of beneficial microorganisms to the mix and a whole lot more. "If you apply compost to a planting area, you reduce the need for water," Darling said. "And you reduce or eliminate the need for pesticides and even fertilizers." So in effect, we're throwing away—usually in plastic bags—organic matter that would greatly benefit our landscaping. And then we go to the garden center and buy plastic bags of, well, organic matter to put on our landscaping. When you look at the big picture, our current habits seem not only shortsighted, but, from both economic and environmental perspectives, downright silly.

So how can you start composting without getting the neighborhood association upset? While an open compost pile covered with leaves works just fine, most urban composters will want a bin situated in a shady spot in the yard. Bins can be purchased for under \$100—much less if you build your own. After that, it's just a matter of dumping your coffee grounds, banana peels and leaves into the compost bin instead of the trash can. Turn it occasionally with a pitchfork, keep it wet enough, and you'll have compost to spread on your flowerbeds or vegetable gardens within six to 12 months.

While Darling says that beginning composters tend to fret about the ratio of green matter (vegetable and fruit scraps and coffee grounds, for instance) to brown matter (dry plant matter like autumn leaves), he maintains that composting is easier than you think: If it's too dry, you can add water; if it's too wet, you can add leaves. The only thing to remember is to keep meats, fat, grease and dairy out of it.

Could composting be catching on? Darling says that for the last annual Master Composter class he taught, they had to turn students away. "Everywhere you look, you see something about the virtues of organic approaches, and compost is fundamental to organic landscaping," Darling said. "I've always thought it was just plain crazy to pour poison around the place where you live." **fw**

Composting Scraps, Reducing Waste

JOHN DARLING *Campus Composter, University of Texas at Arlington*

John Darling, a former UTA biology instructor and museum curator, says he began simply as a backyard composter a little more than a decade ago. But when UTA got a grant to begin composting on campus in 2005, Darling fell into a full-time job devoted to the effort. Since then, he has been in charge of composting the university's nearly 150 pounds of kitchen waste each day, plus the tree and lawn trimmings from the 420-acre campus. All together, the program diverts at least 50 tons a year from the landfill. "I mix it up in the appropriate way, then the groundskeepers take it and apply it to different planting beds on campus," Darling said. "To me, it's like all kinds of recycling:



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