

“What Dr. Seuss Taught Me About Gardening”

Presentation at the Texas Master Gardener 2021 Conference
by
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“I speak for the trees, for the trees have not tongues”
-*The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss

As a former literacy specialist and elementary school teacher (and now a gardener), I was intrigued by the title of this presentation. What *could* Dr. Seuss teach us about gardening? However, using the theme of the book *The Lorax*, as a springboard, the presenter, Jay White, gave us some interesting insights on what we as gardeners can do to help and protect our earth.

Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss) got the idea for the book back in the 1970's during the very first Earth Day observation. The 70's had their own environmental issues, just as we do today.

1971	2021
OVER POPULATION	OVER POPULATION
UNREGULATED INDUSTRY	CLIMATE CHANGE
DDT	Amazon Deforestation
Acid Rain	Drought/Water
Super Fund Sites	Extreme Weather

Speaking of climate change, look at these numbers:

- √ 2020 was the 10th consecutive “hottest year recorded”
- √ 2010-2020 hottest decade ever recorded
- √ 30 named hurricanes in 2020
- √ 5th consecutive year for “above average” activity

So, **what** can we as gardeners do about these environmental challenges? Jay offers some of the following useful suggestions:

1. Transition from gas powered tools to electric ones.

- √ 50 million Americans mow their lawns every week, which uses 800 million gallons of fuel per year. According to the EPA: 1 hour of mowing equals 11 cars driving for one hour.

2. Reduce the number of lawns.

- √ Over 200 million gallons of water a month are used on lawn watering and over 70M pounds of pesticides per year.

3. Follow label instructions.

- √ Very important when using herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers

4. Plant more:

- Trees
 - √ 1.9 billion planted in a year; there are more trees now in world than there were 200 years ago
- Gardens for pollinators, like butterflies, bees, etc.
 - √ Possible that pesticides with nicotine may be affecting the number of bees
- Native plants
 - √ Native plants have evolved to survive in this local environment; many survived the February freeze.
 - √ Maintenance is decreased.
 - √ Planting them decreases the use of water and increases pollinators.
- Food plants
 - √ Should be grown in an environmentally responsible way

5. Use more:

- Organic fertilizers
- Mulch and compost
 - √ Replace the organic material in the soil

6. Use less:

- Water
 - √ Water collection systems, such as rain barrels, can make a significant difference in the amount of water usage
- Pesticides and herbicides
- Synthetic fertilizers
- Book suggestion, "The Alchemy of Air" by Thomas Hager
The Alchemy of Air is the extraordinary, previously untold story of two master scientists who saved the world only to lose everything and of the unforeseen results of a discovery that continues to shape our lives in the most fundamental and dramatic of ways. Thomas Hager, 2008

Whether you consider yourself an *environmentalist* (protecting and preserving and saving the earth from human abuse), a *conservationist* (using the resources of the earth in a way that will

preserve them for future generations,) or maybe a little of both, we **can** make a difference when we adopt just a few of the “best” practices of gardening.

In the words of The Lorax (Dr. Seuss):



Submitted by Nancy Mills, June 2021