

# Public Outreach for Landscape Water Use

## Water Conservation Program



### The Challenge

- Up to 50 percent of water used in the summer and 25 percent of water used annually by San Antonio Water System customers is for landscaping.
- Customer water use patterns indicate that only 25 percent of SAWS customers irrigate heavily on a regular basis.
- Program evaluations have found that many high-use customers with water-saving landscapes over-water. Some use twice or more of the amount of water that is needed.
- Research studies indicate that direct personal, one-on-one contact is the best way to get someone to modify their behavior and make the decision to reduce water use.
- Landscape irrigation advice needs to be repeated frequently.
- There are more than 1.3 million people in the SAWS service area making individual water use choices.
- Changing behavior one person at a time is both labor- and time-intensive.

### The Solution

- SAWS staff offer **free** Home Checkups to assist customers with reducing their water use.
- SAWS contracts with volunteer and governmental organizations with complementary goals to offer workshops, participate in events and assist with research and program management.
- More than 60 workshops and events inform thousands of people about landscape water use annually.
- Exhibits such as the San Antonio Botanical Garden's WaterSaver Lane provide a concrete example of water-saving landscapes for customers to view at their leisure.
- Weekly newspaper columns, local radio call-in shows, events staffed by volunteer experts and a weekly WaterSaver e-newsletter are part of the ongoing communication efforts.

### Case Study: WaterSaver Lane at the San Antonio Botanical Garden

Hosted by the San Antonio Botanical Garden and sponsored by SAWS, WaterSaver Lane is designed to inform and inspire homeowners to create beautiful landscapes that conserve water.

There are six landscape styles in the exhibit, but only five are considered WaterSaver gardens. The traditional American landscape with its thirsty St. Augustine grass is exhibited in contrast to water-saving landscape styles. The water-saving gardens with their miniature cottages improve curb appeal. Enhanced with porches, arbors, and garden ornaments, the different house styles each match their landscape styles: Spanish Courtyard, Cottage Gardens, Manicured Xeriscape, Wildscape and Texas Hill Country.

The exhibit informs visitors about the defining basic elements of each landscape style, the plants typically associated with the style and the basic maintenance and irrigation requirements.

This exhibit is regularly identified by Botanical Garden visitors as their favorite. The exhibit also allows visitors to visualize the beautiful garden they can have in San Antonio with little or no watering. SAWS wants to impart a sense of "I can do that" to the public. Visitors also walk away saying "I WANT to do that!"