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Being a Good Neighbor

The phrase, “being a good neighbor” describes a recognizable set of circumstances to most of us. Whether, it brings to mind references of etiquette and manners or scripture, the concept of a good neighbor is familiar. What if we extend those same patterns of consideration and good will to how we treat not only the people we live near, but also the wildlife, landscape, and plants? Aren’t the mockingbirds, live oaks, and Guadalupe River also our neighbors?

There are many practices you can implement on your own property to create a beautiful environment for yourself that are also good for the land and wildlife. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Wildscapes program encourages landowners to restore habitat for birds, insects, reptiles, and even small mammals, on their properties. Actions like choosing plants that bloom at various times of year, reducing turf grass areas, and using sufficient mulch to reduce weeds and the need to water can all make your land more appealing for you and wildlife.

At the same time, these practices have benefits that extend beyond the borders of your property. Landscapes diverse in native plants thrive in our arid central Texas climate. That means reduced demand on water supplies and consistent ground cover. Eliminating areas of bare soil reduces the opportunity for hearty invasive plants like musk thistle and giant cane to take over and continue spreading. Also, land with healthy and diverse plants captures more runoff, holds more water, and prevents erosion.

Reducing the quantity and controlling the quality of the runoff that leaves your property is probably the number one way you can be a good neighbor to the Guadalupe River. Rain falling on your roof is often quickly funneled away from your house and into the storm sewer to prevent flooding. Unfortunately, that runoff can pick up bacteria, sediments, fertilizers, and pesticides along the way and contaminate surface water. Stormwater runoff, especially in urban areas, is a primary source of pollution in rivers and lakes in the U.S. Practices like rainwater harvesting or rain gardens can reduce the volume of runoff leaving your property. While proper use of lawn chemicals and disposal of pet waste, can reduce the amount of pollution in the runoff.

Having a clear plan before you start a project can help avoid negative outcomes. Find out where possible hazards exist, like buried utility lines or cables, before you start digging. Consider if alterations to your property will have an impact on your neighbor’s property. This is especially true if you are changing how water flows across your property. Permits from local authorities may be required depending on the scale of your project and where it is located. Any type of construction along a waterway requires a floodplain permit, and streamside landowners should use caution to ensure modifications don’t negatively impact the river.

Develop a vision for your property and create a space that you love while also being a steward of your land and the amazing natural resources surrounding you. Check out the TPWD Wildscapes web page for design tips and additional resources.

Let’s Keep Our River Clean