




SOLUTIONS for *your* LIFE




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UF UNIVERSITY of
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IFAS Extension

IPM Integrated Pest Management
Florida

Florida-Friendly Living



Going Green

SMART CHOICES ~ SIMPLE CHANGES

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While a lot of focus has been placed on greening up our homes, let's not forget the yard. You will be surprised how easy it is going green in the landscape.

Small changes in our everyday lives go a long way towards a better environment and preparing us for a greener lifestyle.

This publication highlights practical Florida-friendly practices to get you on the road to being green outdoors.

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GREENING HARDENED SURFACES

Believe it or not, walkways, driveways, and parking areas can be "greened up" too. These high traffic areas are usually covered by compacted gravel, concrete, or other hard surfaces .

But why bother you might ask? Parking lots and drives are often just open deserts of hot asphalt. Rainwater cannot penetrate these impervious surfaces, so it runs away; picking up debris and pollutants as it runs off, affecting the quality of aquatic habitats along with their inhabitants.

There are many green options for making patios, driveways, sidewalks, parking lots and other hard surfaces more porous, or permeable. Some simple Florida-friendly solutions are to create mulch walkways, wooden decks or shell paths. The new porous pavers are an excellent choice for garden paths or consider porous concrete if you are redoing your driveway.





YARDCYCLING FOR A “GREENER” GARDEN

Florida-friendly living is as simple as adopting the three R's. All it really takes is learning ways to Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle in your yard. Recycling your yard trimmings back onto your lawn and landscape can improve the fertility and water-holding ability of the soil and help aerate soil that has become compacted.



Mulching is one of the method of recycling and is an most important way to maintain healthy landscape plants. Reuse fallen leaves and pine needles as mulch under trees and shrubs. Maintain 2–3 inches layer of mulch around plants. Be sure to pull back mulch 2 inches from the base of plants to avoid disease.

Grass recycling is a simple and natural approach to lawn care. Grass clippings are 75% to 85% water. When you mow regularly, grass clippings quickly decompose and release nutrients to fertilize the lawn. Grass recycling helps reduce fertilizer and water usage, which can protect local streams, rivers and the ocean from pollution. Since you don't have to bag your clippings, mowing time is also reduced. Let your grass clippings fall where they may. There's no need to bag or rake lawn clippings. Leave grass clippings on the lawn to recycle nitrogen.



GOING GREEN FROM THE GROUND UP

Soil is arguably the most important component in successful gardening. Frequently Florida soils don't possess the texture or chemical properties for plants to grow well. The good news is...even though you can't replace the soil in your yard, there are things you can do to make it a better environment for your plants.

Amending your soil can put you on the right track for a beautiful,



healthy landscape. Simply by adding organic materials to sandy soils, the nutrient and water holding capacity of the soil dramatically improves. Likewise adding organic matter to clay soils improves drainage and aeration. No matter what your soil type, compost is valuable soil amendments that will help your plants thrive.

Get started by creating and maintaining a compost pile using yard trimmings and kitchen scraps. Nature recycles organic material such as leaves, twigs, grass clippings, and household vegetable food waste decomposing it into a nutrient rich soil amendment.

Backyard composting is a great way to “go green” because 20% or more of household waste is organic materials that otherwise would be disposed of in landfills. Composting rather than trashing these materials saves landfill space. Going green begins from the ground up.



GOING GREEN BEGINS WITH A TREE

Planting trees in your neighborhood really is one of the best practices for improving the local environment as well as the planet. It's no secret that trees help the environment, but you may be surprised by all the benefits that planting trees can provide. Besides producing oxygen and removing carbon dioxide and contaminants from the air, trees have many other social, economic, and environmental benefits.

Trees trap CO₂ from the atmosphere and make carbohydrates that are used for plant growth. In return, trees give off oxygen. According to experts, about 800 million tons of carbon are stored in the trees that make up the urban forests of the U.S. This translates to a savings of \$22 billion in control costs. Mature trees can absorb roughly 48 pounds of CO₂ a year. The tree in turn releases enough oxygen to sustain two human beings.



Trees reduce urban runoff and erosion by storing water and breaking the force of rain as it falls. The USDA reports that 100 mature trees can reduce runoff caused by rainfall by up to 100,000 gallons!

Trees also absorb sound and reduce noise pollution. This is especially important for people who live near freeways. In some cases, a well planted group of trees can reduce noise pollution by up to 10 decibels.

LIGHTEN UP ON GARDEN CHEMICALS

When it comes to pest management, nature takes care of itself! Did you know that less than one percent of all insects are pests on plants so there is no need to routinely spray potentially harmful pesticides in your landscape.

You might be surprised to learn that many beneficial insects feed upon harmful ones, making your job easy. Common beneficial insects such as lady beetles, praying mantis, assassin bugs, ambush bugs, aphid lions and spiders prey on numerous insect pests. Don't forget the pollinators: bees, butterflies and wasps which are very beneficial and ensure we have fruit and vegetables on our tables.

Pesticide sprays can harm the very insects that are so beneficial to the health of our landscapes. Prior to making a decision to spray pests, learn to identify beneficial insects and let them do the work for you. Be tolerant! Low levels of pests will do minimal damage.



Scout your landscape regularly. Check plants for pest problems and prune off a plant's infected areas. Pick off insects when possible.

Use pesticides only to spot-treat affected plants and lawn areas. Avoid blanket applications and choose the least-toxic pesticides such as horticultural oils, insecticidal soaps and *Bacillus thuringiensis* (BT). Always read and follow pesticide labels carefully for safe use and disposal.



GOING GREEN TO KEEP THE WATER BLUE

Going green seems to be on everyone's mind and it's not about applying a heavy dose of fertilizer to green up the front lawn. Did you know, when too much fertilizer is applied to landscapes, it seeps past the root zone of the grass, plants or trees and into the aquifer or runs off into lakes, stream or rivers. Plants, animals and people depend on clean water for survival.



By using fertilizers responsibly we can help prevent water pollution:

- Fertilize lawns, trees and plants only to maintain health. Don't exceed recommended amounts. Fertilizer will not help poor growth caused by too much shade, disease or pests.
- Use slow-release fertilizers that make nutrients available to plants for a longer time. They are kinder to the environment and are usually more cost-effective.
- Use iron instead of nitrogen if you want to green-up your lawn.
- Hold off on fertilizing if a heavy rain is expected, and don't over irrigate after applying.
- Carefully read the label and follow the application directions on the fertilizer package.
- Avoid weed and feed products. It's overkill.



IT'S COOL GOING GREEN



According to the U.S. Department of Energy, a properly landscaped yard can save the average household \$100 to \$250 annually in heating and cooling costs. Landscaping with a focus on energy efficiency has many benefits such as reducing energy costs, controlling noise and air pollution and reducing the surface temperature of the pavement with shade from adjacent trees. It can be cool going green!

The energy efficiency of your home can be enhanced greatly through careful planning, design, and maintenance of your landscape. There are a number of tips to keep in mind while planning your energy efficient landscape:

- Plant trees and shrubs so they can direct breezes. Remove low branches to allow for maximum air movement.
- Plant shade-casting plants around the air conditioning compressor so it doesn't have to work so hard. Be sure that leaves and branches do not block the airflow. Periodically check for fallen leaves.
- Set trellises away from the house to allow air to circulate and keep vines from possibly damaging the exterior surfaces.
- Consider using bark or woodchips for walkways. This helps to keep the yard cooler and provides drainage for water.





MAKE THE MOST OF THE RAIN

Civilizations have been collecting rainwater for thousands of years for use in their homes and on their land. Rainwater collection devices range in complexity, but most are very simple and can be incorporated into your existing gutter and drainage systems.



Most of these rain barrels are relatively inexpensive and each one usually has a spigot on the bottom for easy access to water and a screen on top to keep out bugs and debris.

Rainwater is best used directly on lawns and gardens. Hoses can be connected to the spigot for easy direction of water to needed areas.

Rain barrels and cisterns are low-cost water conservation devices that have the added benefit of reducing stormwater runoff. By storing and diverting runoff from impervious areas such as roofs, these devices reduce the undesirable impacts of runoff that would otherwise flow swiftly into receiving waters and contribute to flooding and erosion problems.



WATER— USE IT WISELY

Experts report that up to 50% of water used by households is used outdoors. Efficient watering will not only help you save money and conserve water, but it can also create a healthier landscape. Through smart choices and simple changes, the following Florida-friendly practices can help you make the most of water in your yard.

- Water your lawn and plants only when you know they need it or show signs of stress.
- Install a drip or micro-spray system in your plant beds. They use water more efficiently than traditional spray heads.
- Install an automatic rain shutoff device to stop watering when it's rained enough.
- Avoid over watering! Over watered grass has short roots that make it harder to survive pest attacks, disease and drought.
- Collect water in a rain barrel to use to water your plants.

