

Florida-Friendly Living: Smart Choices – Simple Changes

2009

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Florida-Friendly Living Smart Choices - Simple Changes

Is your New Year's resolution to live greener in 2009? Before you rush out to purchase any of the paper-consuming books on greener living, try Florida-friendly practices showcased here each month. Small changes in our everyday lives go a long way towards a better environment and preparing us for a greener lifestyle.

Nobel Peace Prize winner, T.S. Eliot best summed it up, "Home is where one starts from." When it comes to going green, there is no better place to begin. Simple "green" up actions that many people are now trying are carpooling, recycling at home and work, changing to compact fluorescent bulbs, and using a clothesline for drying laundry. Smart choices and simple actions taken by people just like you, collectively add up to major changes world wide.

While a lot of focus has been on greening up our homes, let's not forget the yard. You will be surprised how easy it is going green in the landscape. Each month we will highlight practical Florida-friendly practices to get you on the road to being green outdoors.



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January 2009

*"When we tug on a single thing in nature, we tug on everything else."
20th-century naturalist John Muir*

SUNDAY

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FRIDAY

SATURDAY



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New Year's Day

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*Martin Luther
King Jr. Day*

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Growing 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 a valuable soil amendment 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.



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February 2009

Till now man has been up against Nature; from now on he will be up against his own nature. ~Dennis Gabor, Inventing the Future, 1964

SUNDAY **MONDAY** **TUESDAY** **WEDNESDAY** **THURSDAY** **FRIDAY** **SATURDAY**

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8	9	10	11	12 <i>Lincoln's Birthday</i>	13	14
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15	16 <i>Presidents Day</i>	17	18	19	20	21
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22 <i>Washington's Birthday</i>	23	24	25 <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	26	27	28
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Going Green to Keep Our Waters 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. More is not better!



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March 2009

The system of nature, of which man is a part, tends to be self-balancing, self-adjusting, self-cleansing. Not so with technology. ~E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful, 1973

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Daylight Savings Begins

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St. Patrick's Day

First Day of Spring

World Forestry Day

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World Water Day

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Water - Use it Wisely

The Florida Legislature designated April as "Water Conservation Month" due to the dry conditions characteristic of this time of year. Although Florida receives an average of 52 inches of rainfall per year, 60 percent of that annual rainfall is from June through September leaving much of the year dry.

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.
- Use a rain gauge or moisture sensor so you will know if rainfall has done the job.
- 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 overwatering! Overwatered 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.



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April 2009

*We never know the worth of water till the well is dry.
~Thomas Fuller, Gnomologia, 1732*

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Palm Sunday

Passover Begins

Good Friday

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Easter

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Earth Day

Arbor Day

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Lighten Up on the 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.



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May 2009

*Modern technology owes ecology an apology.
~Alan M. Eddison*

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May Day

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Mother's Day

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Memorial Day

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.

Following a few simple Florida-friendly practices will help you green up your community through smart choices and simple changes.

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 protecting local streams, rivers and the ocean from pollutant runoff. 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.

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



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June 2009

*Don't blow it - good planets are hard to find.
~Quoted in Time*

SUNDAY

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World Environment Day

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World Ocean Day

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Flag Day

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Father's Day
First Day of Summer

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It's Cool to Go "Green"

We all know that we can't actually control the weather, but through thoughtful planning, we can cast shade, channel winds, and reduce moisture near our homes. 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 greatly enhanced 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.



PHOTO BY: CHRISTINE HOPLER

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July 2009

A virgin forest is where the hand of man has never set foot.
~Author Unknown

SUNDAY

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Canada Day

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Independence Day

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Make the Most of the Rain

Civilizations have been collecting rainwater for thousands of years for use in their homes and on their land. Although rainwater collection is not suitable for direct consumption, it provides free, clean water for irrigating today's landscapes.

Rain barrels and cisterns are low-cost water conservation devices that can be used to reduce runoff volume from smaller storm events, delay and reduce the peak runoff flow rates. 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.

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.



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August 2009

*We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking
if mankind is to survive. ~Albert Einstein*

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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.

To identify Florida-friendly trees that will work in your yard or landscape design, please refer to www.floridayards.org.



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September 2009

*Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature.
It will never fail you. ~Frank Lloyd Wright*

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Labor Day

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International Coastal Cleanup

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Rosh Hashannah

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First Day of Autumn

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Yom Kippur



On the Wild Side of Going Green

Discover the wonders of nature by attracting critters to your yard. Watching wildlife in action can be fun and relaxing for everyone, and it's a great way to encourage your family to "go green".

With more than 1,200 kinds of animals, Florida ranks third in the nation in wildlife diversity. Establish a habitat that will attract beautiful songbirds, butterflies, frogs, and other interesting wildlife for viewing from your very own window. Don't forget the curb appeal factor! Replacing grass lawns with native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees will increase the beauty of your property and provide a nurturing refuge for wildlife.

There are a few things to keep in mind when you want to attract wildlife:

- Plant vines, shrubs and trees that provide cover, nesting areas, or food for birds, butterflies and other wildlife.
- Provide a water source, such as a bird bath or a small pond, for wildlife.
- Provide wildlife shelters such as a bat house, bird house, brush pile or a dead tree.



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October 2009

When you use a manual push mower, you're "cutting" down on pollution and the only thing in danger of running out of gas is you! ~Grey Livingston

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Columbus Day

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Halloween

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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.



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November 2009

I think the environment should be put in the category of our national security. Defense of our resources is just as important as defense abroad. Otherwise what is there to defend?

~Robert Redford, Yosemite National Park dedication, 1985

SUNDAY **MONDAY** **TUESDAY** **WEDNESDAY** **THURSDAY** **FRIDAY** **SATURDAY**

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Veteran's Day

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Thanksgiving Day

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Green Up the Holidays

During this festive season of giving, consider presenting green garden tools to your garden enthusiast friends. There is a wide variety of gifts ranging from stocking stuffers (native seed packets) to under the tree gifts (bird baths, feeders and green lawn mower). There truly is something for everyone in all price ranges. Here are a few ideas to consider:

Drip Hose and Emitters Kits

Micro-irrigation delivers water close to the root zone; right where plants need it. This water conservation delivery method helps prevent overspray and excess runoff into the street. Do-it-yourself kits are easy to assemble and accommodate any garden layout. Add a timer and watering is effortless.

Rain Barrels

By collecting rain water and storing it in rain barrels, you'll have water for future gardening use. Make your own rain barrel or purchase a pre-constructed unit from your local garden center.

Lean Green Cutting Machines

Thanks in part to stricter emissions regulations, manufacturers are scrambling to make powered mowers that pollute less. Mowing machines are now available that not only spew fewer (or zero) emissions, they're cheaper to run and quieter too—something your neighbors will like if they sleep late on Saturday mornings.

Bird Baths and Bird Feeders

When it comes to the holidays, don't forget your feathered friends. Baths and feeders are a great way to cater to your avian neighbors all year long.



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December 2009

The goal of life is living in agreement with nature. ~Zeno

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Hanukkah Begins

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First Day of Winter

Christmas

Kwanzaa

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New Year's Eve







Take the Green Pledge . . .

We urge everyone to make a personal commitment to make smart choices and simple changes to live greener in 2009. Take the pledge today and do your part to take simple "green" up actions. I pledge to do my part by:

- Setting an example for greener living through Florida-friendly landscape practices. Fertilize lawns, trees and plants only to maintain health. Use organic, slow-release fertilizers on your lawn—or none at all! Gardening chemicals end up in the water in measurable amounts.
- Performing a sprinkler system check-up and tune-up will result in substantial water savings and better plant growth. Start with a visual inspection of each irrigation zone for problems, such as broken, clogged, obstructed, or misdirected sprinklers.
- Maintaining my septic system. Failed septic systems can cause significant water quality problems for waterbodies. Get regular inspections by an experienced professional every three years depending on the type of system you have.
- Preventing the spread of exotic aquatic plants. Thoroughly clean the boat's hull, propeller and trailer after pulling the boat from the water.
- Never packing a pest. When you travel out of Florida resist the temptation to bring back fruit, vegetables, flowers, nuts, plants or animals. Learn to identify and properly remove the invaders from your property.
- Identifying landscape problems prior to spraying, squashing or stomping. Accept a little damage. Natural predators often bring pest problems under control, but they need time to work.
- Establishing a maintenance-free zone of at least 10 feet between your landscape and a water body. A shoreline buffer goes a long way to enhancing the shoreline. Native shrubs and plants have root lengths of 18 inches or more, which help hold the soil in place, minimizing erosion.
- Harvesting rainwater with rain barrels to use for watering your landscape. Rainwater can help to improve the health of your gardens, lawns, and trees.
- Landscaping with plants that are native to Florida. Native plants provides better food and cover for native wildlife, and require less care and resources to maintain than those with non-native plants. Natives are better adapted to local soil conditions, generally do not require fertilizing, and are more resistant to natural pests and diseases.
- Recycle your yard trimmings back into your lawn and landscape to improve soil fertility and water holding capability of the soil.

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