

Make Your Yard Florida-Friendly



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: The author's Florida-Friendly yard.

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We hear a lot these days about the increase of pollution in Wakulla Springs and our area lakes, streams, and rivers. And while we tend to want to point the finger at someone else, we are all part of the problem. The good news is that we can also all be part of the solution.

What can you do as an individual? One thing that you can do is to make your home landscape a Florida-Friendly one. The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN) program is a statewide environmental educational program of the University of Florida IFAS County Extension offices. The primary goal of FYN is to teach homeowners and developers how they can conserve water and reduce pollution associated with stormwater runoff from landscapes by using Florida-Friendly landscaping practices.

There are nine Florida-Friendly landscaping principles: 1) Right Plant, Right Place, 2) Water Efficiently, 3) Fertilize Appropriately, 4) Mulch, 5) Attract Wildlife, 6) Manage Yard Pests Responsibly, 7) Recycle Yard Waste, 8) Reduce Stormwater Runoff, and 9) Protect the Waterfront.

Start-up funding for the program was given to county Extension offices with the understanding that a permanent local funding source be found for its continuation. For example, nearby Okaloosa County, population of about 200,000, permanently funded their FYN coordinator with county funds after the seed money ran out because the initial program had such a strong impact. Escambia County is expected to do likewise with their FYN coordinator this year.

Here in Leon County, there have been no local funds for an FYN coordinator since the start-up funds ran out in 2002. However, Master Gardener volunteers with the Leon County Extension office are anxious to teach other home gardeners the principles of Florida-Friendly landscaping. So, under my direction, they will make FYN their priority this year. Once a month, in this space in the Democrat, we will focus on one of the FYN principles in detail. So follow us over the rest of the year as we teach you to make your yard more Florida-Friendly. This is only the first in a series of FYN columns.

Also, visit the demonstration garden at the Extension office, 615 Paul Russell Road to see the FYN principles in practice. Mark your calendar now for the morning of Saturday, April 21 when we will have an open house in the garden, complete with guided tours.

You will be hearing much more about Florida Yards & Neighborhoods and Florida-Friendly Yards in the months to come. Hopefully we will eventually find funding to hire a local FYN coordinator who will be able to work with builders and developers to design award-winning communities that incorporate the FYN practices in new development. This is a part of the FYN program offered by University of Florida IFAS that has been very successful in other parts of the state.

Meanwhile, visit <http://www.floridayards.org/> and start out with Florida Friendly Landscaping 101. Take the on-line landscaping quiz and tutorial. And get started now in being a part of the solution to pollution from fertilizers, pesticides, and sedimentation from home landscapes.

And stay tuned for next month's column on the first FYN principle, "Right Plant, Right Place." Some of you may be thinking that means just native plants. But that's not necessarily the case. It means finding the best plant for the site conditions and needs.

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