

## Reduce Stormwater Runoff from Your Florida Friendly Yard



*Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Porous surfaces, such as brick and stone, and groundcovers, such as this ornamental peanut, are easy methods to use to help stormwater soak into the landscape rather than run off.*

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To the relief of all Floridians, Tropical Storm Barry ushered in the rainy season the first week in June. But with the return of much needed rain comes the summer problem of how to handle stormwater runoff.

The typically heavy summer rains in Tallahassee cause a huge amount of stormwater runoff into streams and lakes. This stormwater runoff picks up pollutants as it travels. The pollutants may include petro-chemicals from roads but also excess fertilizer and pesticides from our yards. Even soil and organic matter such as leaf litter can be pollutants as they wash into streams and lakes. So we need to reduce runoff from our yards.

We also need to be concerned about pollutants leaching straight downward into our groundwater. This is especially true in the southern part of Leon County where the groundwater lies nearer the surface, covered by porous limestone and sandy soils. We obtain most of our drinking water from groundwater sources, so the problem affects us all.

University of Florida's IFAS County Extension offices around the state have initiated the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program. Its objective is to assist every homeowner

make every raindrop count as a positive influence on the aquifer by teaching us to have Florida Friendly Yards.

It's a basic concept that rain which falls in a yard should soak into the yard. After all, rain is the best water source for Florida landscapes. Given the price of water from a utility company, rain is literally pennies, or dollars, from heaven, or at least the stratosphere.

Compacted soils required for construction present a challenge to rain absorption. A little planning and preparation can help improve the success in this area.

Consider these practical tips:

**Down spouts** - If your roof has rain gutters, aim the downspouts at a porous surface so water can soak into the soil. Be sure the plants in the area can adapt to wet/dry extremes.

**Earth Shaping** – Incorporate attractive, functional contours into your landscape. Swales and berms will help divert runoff that would otherwise rush from your yard. Waterfront yards may want to employ both swales and berms to control runoff into ponds and streams.

**Densely growing lawn grass or groundcovers** will prove especially useful to discourage erosion, capture rain and filter nutrients. Wooded, natural areas, with their natural leaf mulch also serve this purpose. A maintenance-free zone of native wetland plants around the lake or stream will make waterfront yards more effective.

**Rain barrels** offer the avid gardener a way to save rain for the dry season and periodic droughts. The barrels have a hole on the lid that accepts the snugly fitting downspout. A spout near the bottom allows the homeowner to fill a can or attach a hose.

**Cisterns** are an ancient technology which accomplishes the same goal as rain barrels but on a larger scale. They can be constructed from several different materials such as concrete, metal, fiberglass, or plastic. If a top is not used the homeowner may want to use a *Bacillus thuringiensis* product made to prevent mosquito infestation. Garden centers sell these.

**Porous surfaces** should be used whenever possible for traffic areas such as driveways, walkways, and patios. Materials such as gravel, mulch and pervious concrete will allow rainwater to seep into the ground. A positive byproduct will be that the porous surfaces will act as a filter if any runoff is captured.

One caution is that water should not be channeled or retained next to a structure or building. Chronically damp soil can promote the establishment and growth of wood destroying organisms.

By making every raindrop count a homeowner can accomplish several goals. A cleaner aquifer will result, a greener lawn and landscape will be promoted, and the monthly water bill will be lower. All are good things.

For more information on having a Florida Friendly Yard, visit <http://floridayards.org/>

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