Make Your Landscape Florida-Friendly

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: The first principle of having a Florida-Friendly Landscape is to select the right plant for the right place, such as this agapanthus for blue flowers in a sunny landscape bed.

Glenn Mayne is a Master Gardener volunteer with the Leon County Extension of University of Florida IFAS, http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu

Thursday, May 21, 2009
Tallahassee Democrat

Research and testing of the water quality in Florida have strongly indicated that we are slowly polluting the very resource that makes life on our planet possible. Samples from both ground water and lakes and streams indicate a rising level of pollutants. Scientists believe that one of the many sources of this contamination is from pesticides and fertilizer used on residential yards. These are washed into our water supply as a result of stromwater runoff and from simply percolating down into the Florida aquifer. Not only does this foul our water supply, but it also has a very harmful effect on our wildlife.

What can we do about this disturbing pollution? Well, each one of us can take steps in the way we manage our own yards to reverse this trend. The University of Florida, through its Institute of Food and Agricultural Services (UF-IFAS), has developed a program in cooperation with its statewide Master Gardener office. It is based on the premise that if each individual property owner understands this problem and takes positive steps to prevent this water contamination, we can reverse the process and preserve our good water quality for future generations. This overall program is termed “Florida Friendly Landscaping” (http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/about.htm#). It encompasses both training for horticultural professionals (Florida Green Industry Best Management Practices) as well as for homeowners and home builders (Florida Yards & Neighborhoods, FYN). The FYN program is based on nine principles for good property management practices:

1) Select the Right Plant in the Right place
2) Water Efficiently
3) Fertilize Appropriately
4) Mulch
5) Provide for Wildlife
6) Manage Yard Pests Responsibly
7) Recycle Yard Waste
8) Reduce Stormwater Runoff
9) For those who live on waterfronts, Protect the Waterfront

The Leon County Master Gardener volunteers, in cooperation with the Leon County Extension Center of UF-IFAS, have developed a volunteer effort to help Leon County homeowners make our yards Florida-Friendly. A team of trained and certified Master Gardeners can schedule a time to come to your residential property and evaluate just how well you are adhering to these nine principles and whether your property meets the criteria to be declared a “Florida Friendly Yard”. If the property qualifies, then you are presented with a yard sign to publicly announce this fact. You also receive a written report of the team’s findings and recommendations.

This program has been in existence for two years now and we have performed over 60 of these evaluations. Our major emphasis is to educate property owners as to a better way to manage your yards.

In addition to addressing practices that affect water quality, we are finding that exotic invasive plants are a major problem in Leon County. We are seeing an alarming number of plants, that because of their invasiveness, are prohibited for sale in Florida and in Leon County, but that are still in many residential landscapes. We also find that property owners are usually unaware of the invasive nature of these plants and their ability to choke out native and non-invasive species. Unfortunately, these invasive plants are also prevalent on our public lands, such as city parks, and along county roadways. The most common invasive species that we see are Japanese Climbing fern, Chinese Tallow Tree, Coral Ardesia, and Nandina, all of which are prohibited for sale in our county.

Once these plants become established in our landscapes, they are not easy to eradicate. I know from personal experience, as I am in my fourth year of a constant effort to eliminate these plants from my property. It is an ongoing process and one that requires constant and diligent attention.

If you are interested in having your yard evaluated in terms of adherence to the nine FYN principles and to find out if you have a “Florida Friendly Yard”, you may request an FYN evaluation by calling 606-5202. A Master Gardener volunteer will either complete a request form for you over the phone or send you an FYN Request Form. Or, visit us at our exhibit at the Demonstration Garden Open House (Leon County Extension Center, 615 Paul Russell Road) on Saturday, May 30, at 9:00 a.m.

After we have your completed FYN Request form, we will assign a Master Gardener team and make preparations for a visit to determine if your property is “Florida Friendly”. And if it’s not, we can help you to make it Florida-Friendly. The whole community benefits from Florida-Friendly landscapes.

###