



**FLORIDA-  
FRIENDLY  
LANDSCAPING™  
GUIDE  
FOR  
COMMUNITY  
ASSOCIATIONS  
AND  
RESIDENTS**

*Developed by*

Citrus County UF/IFAS Extension  
3650 West Sovereign Path, Suite 1  
Lecanto, FL 34461



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# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Plan First</b> .....	<b>4</b>
What's your goal?	
Getting started on a plan	
Locate activity areas	
<b>Landscape Design</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Plan first, plant last	
Determine soil characteristics	
Group plants according to watering needs	
Color-plan	
Consider the whole picture	
Design for easy maintenance	
<b>Plant Listing</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Trees	
Palms	
Shrubs	
Grasses	
Vines	
Ground covers	
Wildflowers	
<b>Mulch</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Organic mulch	
Inorganic mulch	
Using mulch	
<b>Landscape Maintenance</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Irrigating	
Fertilizing	
Composting	
Trimming and pruning	
Pest control in your landscape	
<b>Expansion of Mulched Beds</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Right-of-Way and Community Deed Restrictions</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>More References and Resources</b> .....	<b>20</b>

# FLORIDA-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING™ GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS AND RESIDENTS

Landscaping helps homeowners express their personalities while achieving such practical aims as reducing water use, providing noise or visual buffering, beautifying the property, accommodating wildlife and more.

Owners within deed-restricted communities have some special landscaping challenges. Many community associations (CA) mandate review of initial landscaping plans or require board approval of landscaping changes to retain the community standard and look. Be sure to review your CA rules before beginning a landscape plan. If you're in doubt, ask your association's board for assistance or guidance.

## **Times are changing**

Developers have traditionally relied on expanses of water-hungry plants and grasses in community design. However, we are in a new era of water conservation that no longer favors water-hungry plants, for reasons both environmental and financial.

To be responsible stewards of our environment and reduce the financial burden associated with traditional landscaping practices, we must reduce our water needs. The single best way to do that is to reduce the use of thirsty turfgrasses and plants. This can be done while maintaining or even improving the aesthetic value of our homes and neighborhoods.

## **Help is here**

This guide was developed for residents and communities looking for landscaping alternatives that will meet community standards, thrive in our climate and minimize maintenance and water use.

The collaboration began with contacts from people who are reducing grass areas and replacing them with low-maintenance, low-water-use "Florida-Friendly Landscaping™." It is a joint effort of the Citrus County UF/IFAS Extension, Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN) program (using Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles), the Citrus County Water Resources Department and residents of Citrus County communities.

## **What's in this guide for me?**

This guide is designed for use by Community Association boards making landscaping decisions as well as for residents making decisions for their individual homes.

Using information here will help communities and their residents reduce water use and reduce turf maintenance and replacement costs while enhancing landscaping and improving residential properties. It will help you incorporate Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles as you transition to more suitable plantings.

## 1. PLAN FIRST

*What do I want to accomplish with my new landscaping?*

In reworking your landscape to use Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles, your underlying objective is to reduce the use of “thirsty” plants and subsequently reduce water usage. But as you consider what to do, think about what you want to accomplish.

### What’s your goal?

Some popular uses of landscaping include:

- Beautifying the property
- Developing butterfly, bird or other wildlife-friendly environments
- Providing a noise barrier to traffic or neighbors
- Providing a visual barrier for your living spaces from outdoors
- Providing a visual improvement for views from indoors
- Providing an “edible landscape” of fresh fruits and vegetables

### Getting started on a plan

When you’ve established your goals, get started by making a rough sketch of your property.

Many people use graph paper for their sketches. As an alternative, visit the Citrus County Property Appraiser’s website ([www.pa.citrus.fl.us](http://www.pa.citrus.fl.us)) to get a printable overhead view of your property to provide a base for your sketch, as well as your lot and home dimensions.

On your sketch, make notes about various conditions; for example, drainage, location of low-lying or wet areas, runoff area from the house, full sun and heavily shaded areas and areas that are particularly exposed to wind or cold.

On your sketch, also include the location of “can’t change” items, including roof overhangs, septic systems, paved areas, power lines and underground utilities. For locating underground utility lines, use the national “Call Before You Dig” number, 811, which was created to help protect you from unintentionally hitting underground utility lines. This service is free and you are required by law to call before doing any digging.

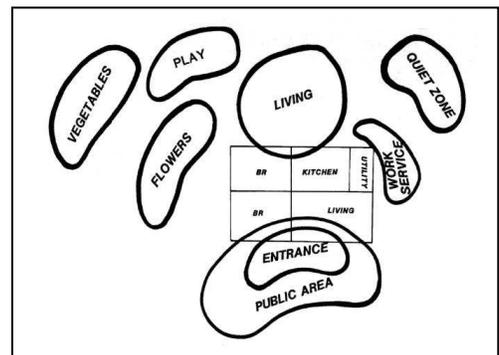
Think about what hardscape or landscape elements you plan to keep.

### Locate activity areas

What activities will be taking place in your yard? On your plot map, or on a piece of tracing paper over it, sketch the outline of these areas.

They could include a public area, entrance, living area, or vegetable or cut-flower garden bed. Draw them to scale and to the size necessary to accommodate the activity.

The illustration at right shows an example.



## 2. LANDSCAPE DESIGN

*Where and how should I place individual and group plantings?*

### **Plan first, plant last**

Planning well helps guarantee success. Specifying plants is the last step in the design process and will be addressed in Chapter 3.

Up to now, you have visualized plant form and size, and you've identified general conditions. Now is the time to choose the right types of plants for the right places.

### **Determine soil characteristics**

Different plants require different soil pH and nutrient levels. You can have a soil sample tested for pH, lime requirement and levels of phosphorus, potassium, calcium and magnesium for \$7.00 through the University of Florida's Soil Testing Laboratory. Visit <http://soilslab.ifas.ufl.edu/> for instructions for submitting a soil sample. A basic soil pH-only test can be done through the Citrus County UF/IFAS Extension Office at 3650 W. Sovereign Path, Lecanto, FL 34461, 352-527-5700 for \$3.00. Prices are current as of 03/15/11, but are subject to change.

### **Group plants according to watering needs**

Group drought-tolerant plants in areas where they will not receive irrigation or in a separate zone in which irrigation can be shut off after plants are established.

For plants needing more frequent watering, group them convenient to a water source, such as a drip irrigator, or where gutter runoff can be captured.

### **Color-plan**

You can have seasonal colors by choosing plants that bloom at different times of the year. Combine color preferences such as different pastels or contrasting bright colors.

Darker plant colors show up better against a light-colored wall and vice versa. Pick two or three colors and repeat them throughout the garden or landscape.

Plants should be placed in groups of odd numbers – such as quantities of three or five – for greater visual appeal. Repeat plants and colors throughout the landscape.

### **Consider the whole picture**

- Lead the eye by putting larger plants in the back or center of plant beds, then graduate plant heights down to the edges. Keep plants low near walkways and patios.
- Take the long view: space plants according to their mature size; for example, in large areas or groups, place them to cover the area in three to five years. And if you plan a hedge using shrubs that grow to be four feet wide, they should be planted four feet on center.
- Place plants far enough from the house to provide adequate air circulation near the house. Generally, that distance should be at least the radius of the plant at maturity. Placing plants too close to the house is a common mistake.

- Use plants strategically to improve your home's heating and cooling capacity. Tree shade, for instance, can reduce air conditioning costs by an estimated 50 percent. Plant deciduous shade trees on the south, east and west sides of your house to cast shade in summer and let warming light enter windows in winter. To lower air conditioning costs, shade the outside condensing unit but be careful to allow sufficient room for air circulation. Shade also reduces plants' water needs by reducing evaporation.
- If you do plant near the house, leave an alley for house maintenance, drainage and to discourage root incursion.
- Combine plants with different textures in the same bed to create visual interest.
- Beds can be created around light poles, mailboxes, other hardscapes and in corners of the yard. Everything doesn't have to be anchored to the house.
- Learn about invasive plants and avoid them. They can spread aggressively outside their natural range and, in some cases, ruthlessly choke out other plant life. Ultimately, invasive plants alter habitats and reduce biodiversity. Refer to the University of Florida's Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants at <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu> for more information.
- Remember that extreme weather conditions in our area can include tropical storms and hurricanes. When you choose plants, think about how they stand up to storm winds. When you place them, do so with an eye to possible collateral damage. There are some excellent references in the resource section of this guide.

### **Design for easy maintenance**

Even a perfectly designed and installed landscape will fail if maintenance fails. Make it easy on yourself and minimize your future efforts by designing easy maintenance into the plan. For community landscaping, planning low-maintenance landscaping will help keep contract costs down while ensuring that community aesthetic standards are upheld.

The key is simplicity and thinking ahead. Avoid unnecessary detail. Limit the number of plant species and create well-defined planted areas. Avoid improper plant selection, spacing and installation that can cause maintenance headaches or even damage to structures.

Tree beds can eliminate trimming, reduce lawn mower damage to tree trunks and increase the speed of mowing. Edging of beds creates a sharp, clean line and reduces maintenance requirements. Make sure bed lines encompassing a lawn area meet at angles greater than 90 degrees. Walk, driveway and patio surfaces in grassed areas should be above ground level.

### 3. PLANT LISTING

*Which plants should I use? Descriptions and growing requirements*

Use this summary when you are ready to choose specific plants. Factors such as exposure (southern versus northern) and proximity to water affect how plants survive winter low temperatures and summer high temperatures. Most of Citrus County is in USDA Hardiness Zone 9a, however, the northernmost part of the county is in Zone 8b; plants suited to Zone 8b have an increased ability to withstand winter temperatures.

The table below is organized in categories: trees, palms, shrubs, grasses, vines, ground covers and wildflowers. The table includes native and exotic plants that are well-suited to Citrus County and have low- to medium-water needs. It also shows mature size, sun/shade requirements and other characteristics. Where “wildlife attractor” is indicated, it means that birds, butterflies and other wildlife are attracted to the plant’s flowers or fruits/nuts.

For photographs and more information on these plants, visit the University of Florida website [www.FloridaYards.org](http://www.FloridaYards.org). The website includes an interactive plant database that will sort and select dozens of beautiful, low-maintenance plants that will thrive in your yard.

When you shop for plants, try to use their scientific names because common names may be used to refer to several different plants.

**Abbreviations:**

**Water needs:** L = low M = medium **Exposure:** FS = full sun PSh = partial shade

Plants	Size in feet	Water needs	Sun/ Shade	Additional Info
<b>TREES</b>				
<i>Acacia farnesiana</i> , <b>Sweet Acacia</b>	10-25 T x 15-25 W	L	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Acer barbatum</i> , <b>Florida Maple</b>	25-60 T x 25-40 W	L	FS	Fall color
<i>Acer rubrum</i> , <b>Red Maple</b>	35-80 T x 25-35 W	M	FS	Fall color
<i>Callistemon</i> species, <b>Bottlebrush</b>	6-30 T x 6-15 W	L	FS	Red flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Cercis canadensis</i> , <b>Redbud</b>	20-30 T x 15-35 W	L	FS	Pink flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Citrus</i> species, <b>Citrus</b>	12-30 T x 15-30 W	M	FS	White flowers; Edible fruit
<i>Eriobotrya japonica</i> , <b>Loquat</b>	20-30 T x 30-35 W	M	FS	White flowers, Edible fruit
<i>Ilex attenuata</i> , <b>East Palatka Holly</b>	30-45 T x 10-15 W	M	FS	Red berries

<b>Plants</b>	<b>Size in feet</b>	<b>Water needs</b>	<b>Sun/ Shade</b>	<b>Additional Info</b>
<b>TREES (cont.)</b>				
<i>Ilex opaca</i> , <b>American Holly</b>	to 50 T x varies	L	FS	Red berries
<i>Ilex vomitoria</i> , <b>Yaupon Holly</b>	Varies	L	PSh	Red berries
<i>Juniperus virginiana</i> , <b>Red cedar</b>	50 T x 25 W	L	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i> , <b>Crape Myrtle</b>	Varies	L	FS	Summer flowers, various colors
<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> , <b>Southern Magnolia</b>	60-80 T x 30-40 W	M	FS	Spring white flowers
<i>Myrica cerifera</i> , <b>Wax Myrtle</b>	10-40 T x 20-25 W	M	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Pinus elliottii</i> , <b>Slash Pine</b>	75-100 T x 35-50 W	L	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Pinus palustris</i> , <b>Longleaf Pine</b>	60-80 T x 30-40 W	L	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Platanus occidentalis</i> , <b>Sycamore</b>	75-90 T x 50-70 W	M	FS	Needs room
<i>Podocarpus macrophyllus</i> , <b>Podocarpus, Yew</b>	30-40 T x 20-25 W	L	FS-PSh	
<i>Quercus hemisphaerica</i> , <b>Laurel Oak</b>	60-70 T x 35-45 W	M	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Quercus shumardii</i> , <b>Shumard Oak</b>	55-80 T x 40-50 W	L	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Quercus virginiana</i> , <b>Live Oak</b>	40-80 T x 60-120 W	L	FS	Needs room; Wildlife attractor
<i>Rhus copallina</i> , <b>Winged Sumac</b>	24 T x 12 W	L	FS	Summer, fall flowers; fall color
<i>Taxodium ascendens</i> , <b>Pond Cypress</b>	50-60 T x 10-15 W	L	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Taxodium distichum</i> , <b>Bald Cypress</b>	60-80 T x 25-35 W	L	FS	Wildlife attractor

Plants	Size in feet	Water needs	Sun/ Shade	Additional Info
<b>PALMS</b>				
<i>Butia capitata</i> , <b>Pindo Palm</b>	15-25 T x 10-15 W	L	FS	
<i>Livistona chinensis</i> , <b>Chinese Fan Palm</b>	varies	L	FS	
<i>Rhapidophyllum hystrix</i> , <b>Needle Palm</b>	2-10 T x 2-6 W	L	FS	
<i>Rhapsis excelsa</i> , <b>Lady Palm</b>	8 T x 5-10 W	M	PSH	
<i>Sable minor</i> , <b>Dwarf Palmetto</b>	4-9 T x 4-8 W	L	PSH	Wildlife attractor
<i>Serenoa repens</i> , <b>Saw Palmetto</b>	3-10 T x 4-10 W	L	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Sabal Palmetto</i> , <b>Cabbage Palm</b>	25-60 T x 10-15 W	L	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Trachycarpus fortunei</i> , <b>Windmill Palm</b>	10-25 T x 6-10 W	M	FS	

Plants	Size in feet	Water needs	Sun/ Shade	Additional Info
<b>SHRUBS</b>				
<i>Agave americana</i> , <b>Century Plant</b>	6 T x varies	L	FS	
<i>Baccharis halimifolia</i> , <b>Salt Bush, Sea Myrtle</b>	8-12 T x 6-12 W	L	FS	Fall/winter white flowers fall like snow when plant is shaken
<i>Bambusa</i> species, <b>Bamboo</b>	Varies	L-M	FS-PSH	Great "living fence;" only use clumping types (not running)
<i>Buddleia</i> species, <b>Butterfly Bush</b>	4-6 T x 4 W	M	FS	Purple, pink, white flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Cactaceae</i> species, <b>Cactus</b>	varies	L	FS	Flower colors vary
<i>Callicarpa americana</i> , <b>Beautyberry</b>	6-8 T x 6-8 W	L	PSH	Pink flowers; Wildlife/berries
<i>Erythrina herbacea</i> , <b>Coral Bean</b>	3 T x 3 W	L	PSH	Spring/summer red flowers; Wildlife attractor

Plants	Size in feet	Water needs	Sun/ Shade	Additional Info
<b>SHRUBS (cont.)</b>				
<i>Feijoa sellowiana</i> , <b>Pineapple Guava</b>	8-15 T x 8-15 W	L	FS	Spring white to pink and red flowers
<i>Hypericum species</i> , <b>St. John's Wort</b>	1-3 T x 1 W	L	PSh	Spring/summer yellow flowers
<i>Lantana montevidensis</i> , <b>Trailing Lantana</b>	Varies	L	FS	Purple flowers all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Leucophyllum frutescens</i> , <b>Texas Sage</b>	3-5 T x 3-5 W	L	FS	Pink flowers all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Lyonia ferruginea</i> , <b>Rusty Lyonia</b>	10-20 T x 5-10 W	L	FS	Spring white flowers; fragrant
<i>Nerium oleander</i> , <b>Oleander</b>	To 20 T X 10 W	L	FS	Summer flowers, various colors; all parts poisonous
<i>Plumbago auriculata</i> , <b>Plumbago</b>	5-6 T x 2-3 W	M	FS	Blue flowers all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Pyracantha species</i> , <b>Firethorn</b>	6-10 T x 8-10 W	M	FS	Summer white flowers, red berries; Wildlife attractor
<i>Rhododendron austrinum</i> , <b>Florida Azalea</b>	6-10 T x 4-8 W	L	PSh	Spring yellow/orange flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Rhododendron canescens</i> , <b>Pinxter Azalea</b>	8-12 T x 6-10 W	M	PSh	Spring pink/white flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Raphiolepis species</i> , <b>Indian Hawthorn</b>	2-10 T x 2-6 W	L	FS	Spring pink or white flowers
<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> , <b>Rosemary</b>	5-6 T x 3 W	L	FS	Blue flowers
<i>Spiraea species</i> , <b>Spiraea</b>	3-6 T x 3-6 W	L	FS	Spring white flowers
<i>Vaccinium species</i> , <b>Sparkleberry</b>	4-6 T x 4-6 W	M	FS	Wildlife attractor
<i>Viburnum Oborvatum</i> , <b>Walter's Viburnum</b>	8-25 T x 6-10 W	M	PSh	Spring white flowers; Wildlife attractor

Plants	Size in feet	Water needs	Sun/ Shade	Additional Info
<b>ORNAMENTAL GRASSES</b>				
<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i> , <b>Japanese Silvergrass</b>	3-9 T x 2-8 W	L	FS	Summer/fall flower spikes
<i>Muhlenbergia capillaris</i> , <b>Muhly Grass</b>	2-5 T x 2-3 W	L	FS	Fall purple flowers
<i>Spartina</i> species, <b>Cordgrass</b>	2-6 T x variable	L	FS	
<i>Tripsacum dactyloides</i> , <b>Fakahatchee Grass</b>	4-6 T x 4-6 W	M	FS	

Plants	Size in feet	Water needs	Sun/ Shade	Additional Info
<b>VINES</b>				
<i>Campsis Radicans</i> , <b>Trumpet Vine</b>	20-30 T x varies	M	FS	Summer orange/red flowers
<i>Ipomoea</i> species, <b>Ornamental Sweet Potato Vine</b>	5-10 T x varies	L	FS-PSH	Bright green, purple or tricolor foliage
<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i> , <b>Coral Honeysuckle</b>	Varies	L	FS	Spring/summer red flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i> , <b>Virginia Creeper</b>	Varies	L	Any	Fall color
<i>Passiflora incarnata</i> , <b>Passion Flower</b>	8-12 T x varies	L	FS	Summer/fall purple flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Tecomaria capensis</i> , <b>Cape Honeysuckle</b>	3-5 T x 3-4 W	M	PSH	Spring/fall red/orange flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Trachelospermum asiaticum</i> , <b>Asiatic Jasmine</b>	10-15 T x varies	M	PSH	
<i>Trachelospermum jasminoides</i> , <b>Confederate Jasmine</b>	1.5 T x varies	L	FS	Spring white flowers; fragrant
<i>Wisteria frutescens</i> , <b>American Wisteria</b>	10-20 T x 6-12 W	M	FS	Spring purple/white flowers

Plants	Size in feet	Water needs	Sun/ Shade	Additional Info
<b>GROUND COVERS</b>				
<i>Aloe</i> species, <b>Aloe</b>	varies	L	FS	
<i>Arachis glabrata</i> , <b>Perennial Peanut</b>	varies	L	PSh	Yellow flowers all year
<i>Bulbine frutescens</i> , <b>Burn Jelly Plant</b>	1 T x 2 W	L	FS	Orange/yellow flowers all year
<i>Ficus pumila</i> , <b>Creeping Fig</b>	varies	M	PSh	
<i>Helianthus debilis</i> , <b>Beach Sunflower</b>	1-4 T x 2-4 W	L	FS	Spring-fall yellow flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Hemerocallis</i> species, <b>Daylilies</b>	1-3 T x 1-2 W	L	FS/PSh	Spring flowers, many colors; Wildlife attractor
<i>Juniperus</i> species, <b>Juniper</b>	0.5-1 T x 1-2 W	M	FS	
<i>Liriope</i> species, <b>Liriope</b>	1 T x 1 W	L	FS	Summer purple flowers
<i>Mimosa strigillosa</i> , <b>Sunshine Mimosa</b>	1/2 T x 3/4 W	L	FS	Pink flowers all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Tulbaghia violacea</i> , <b>Society Garlic</b>	1-2 T x 1-2 W	L	FS	Summer-fall purple flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Yucca</i> species, <b>Yucca</b>	3-12 T x 3-6 W	L	FS	Spring/summer white flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Zamia floridana</i> , <b>Coontie</b>	2-5 T x 3-5 W	L	PSh	Wildlife attractor

Plants	Size in feet	Water needs	Sun/ Shade	Additional Info
<b>WILDFLOWERS</b>				
<i>Asclepias curassavica</i> , <b>Scarlet Milkweed</b>	3 T	L	FS	Red/orange flowers all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Chamaecrista fasciculata</i> , <b>Partridge Pea</b>	1-3 T x 1-2 W	L	FS-PSh	Summer-fall yellow flowers; Attracts beneficial wasps that control mole crickets
<i>Coreopsis</i> species, <b>Coreopsis</b>	3 T	L	FS	Summer yellow flowers; Wildlife attractor

Plants	Size in feet	Water needs	Sun/ Shade	Additional Info
<b>WILDFLOWERS (cont.)</b>				
<i>Glandularia pulchella</i> , <b>Moss Verbena</b>	1 T	M	FS	Various color flowers, all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Gaillardia pulchella</i> , <b>Blanket Flower</b>	2 T	L	FS	Red/yellow flowers all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Helianthus angustifolius</i> , <b>Narrow-Leaved Sunflower</b>	6 T	L	FS	Summer/fall yellow flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Liatrus chapmanii</i> , <b>Blazing Star</b>	3 T	L	FS	Summer/fall purple flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Opuntia humifusa</i> , <b>Prickly-pear Cactus</b>	1.5 T	L	FS	Spring/summer yellow flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Phlox drummondii</i> , <b>Garden Phlox</b>	2 T	L	FS	Spring/summer red, pink or white flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Rudbeckia hirtii</i> , <b>Black- Eyed Susan</b>	3 T	L	FS	Yellow flowers all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Salvia azurea</i> , <b>Blue Sage</b>	3 T	L	FS	Summer/fall blue flowers; Wildlife attractor
<i>Salvia coccinea</i> , <b>Tropical Sage</b>	2.5 T	L	FS	Red flowers all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Solidago</i> species, <b>Goldenrod</b>	3 T	M	FS	Yellow flowers all year; Wildlife attractor
<i>Spermacoce verticillata</i> , <b>False Shrubby Buttonweed, Larra Flower</b>	2 T x 2 W	L	FS-PSh	White flowers all year; Attracts beneficial wasps that control mole crickets
<i>Stachytarpheta jamaicensis</i> , <b>Blue Porterweed</b>	2 T	L	FS	Blue flowers all year; Wildlife attractor

## 4. MULCH

*What type of mulch do I choose and how should I use it?*

Choose among the various types of mulch according to your need.

### **Organic mulch**

Organic mulch helps keep the soil cool, retaining moisture longer, and mulched beds are aesthetically pleasing. Additionally, as organic mulches decompose, they add nutrients and organic matter to your soil. The least expensive mulch option is to use your own yard waste, including pine straw, grass clippings and oak leaves.

Florida-friendly mulch choices include melaleuca (an invasive tree), pine bark nuggets and pine straw (byproducts of the logging industry) and eucalyptus (a fast-growing tree grown on plantations).

Free mulch made from residential yard waste can be picked up at the Citrus County Central Landfill at 230 W. Gulf to Lake Highway, Lecanto, FL 34461 (when available) in both coarse and fine grind; call 352-527-7670 to check availability.

Cypress mulch is often made from the waste wood generated in the manufacture of fencing, flooring, furniture and other wood products, but it may also be produced from whole trees cut from wetlands. The Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program does not recommend the use of cypress mulch, as its origins may be difficult to determine. Also, cypress mulch may repel water when it becomes dry and may intercept water from reaching the plant's roots.

### **Inorganic mulch**

Inorganic mulches (rock, rubber, shell, etc.) are useful, but also present challenges. Inorganic mulches do not retain moisture, so they should be used in areas where moisture is undesirable, such as in pathways, around the foundation of the home or around plants that can't tolerate "wet feet," like cactus. Inorganic mulch can hold heat, which could cause heat stress to plants. Rock needs a ground fabric under it to prevent sinking and can be difficult to work with after installation, for example, when replanting or changing irrigation lines. Limestone and shell will raise the soil pH, which is undesirable for most plants. Rubber may leach chemicals, though research is limited in this area.

### **Using mulch**

Some gardeners like to place a layer of newspaper or commercial garden cloth underneath mulch to smother weeds. If you use newspaper, a good depth is 15 to 20 sheets. Both newspaper and garden cloth will eventually disintegrate, although garden cloth takes much longer.

Mulch should be applied two to three inches deep and reapplied as needed to maintain the depth, for instance in spring and fall. If you have mulched previously, check to see how deep the existing layer is before applying more, and add just enough to freshen it up. Also, taper the mulch back to ground level as you near the trunk or the crown of a plant. Do not allow mulch to touch trunks and stems because this causes rot.

## 5. LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

*Now I have it, how do I care for and maintain it?*

Whether you are working on community landscaping or on your own residence, you'll need to consider five major maintenance tasks:

- Irrigating
- Fertilizing
- Composting
- Trimming and pruning
- Pest control

### **Irrigating**

We are living with watering restrictions now, and they will probably become more stringent. If you planned your landscape well and chose drought-tolerant plants wherever possible, you'll be saving water and money in the long run. You may need to check with your community association for your responsibilities on watering.

Even if you have an assigned day to water plants, it doesn't mean you have to do it. Only water when it's necessary and let your plants tell you when they need watering.

#### *Recognize the signs of overwatering*

- Yellowing leaves (may also indicate nutrient deficiency) and loss of leaves
- Spotted or black foliage
- Fungus (gray leaf spot, brown patch, rust, etc.)
- Plant does not perk up when watered (overwatering drowns and kills the root system, which means more water won't solve the problem)
- Insect and disease problems: Excessive irrigation and fertilization cause weak, tender growth that is especially appealing to insects and diseases; additionally, some insects, such as grubs, require excessive moisture to complete their life cycle.
- Thatch (may also be caused by over-fertilization)

#### *Recognize drought symptoms*

Lawns should be irrigated when about half or more of the lawn shows signs of wilt, including:

- Folding/curling leaf blades
- Blue-gray color
- Footprints remain visible long after they were made

#### *Make sure your irrigation system is efficient*

- Measure the application rate (inches per hour) so you know the amount of time necessary to apply  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch of water. Applying this amount saturates the root zone without "losing" water applied below the root zone.
- Test the coverage/uniformity of your irrigation system. Note inconsistent coverage areas (too light or too heavy) and make repairs to fix this problem.
- Get information on irrigation system calibration at the University of Florida's website [www.solutionsforyourlife.com](http://www.solutionsforyourlife.com).

For information on watering restrictions, call:

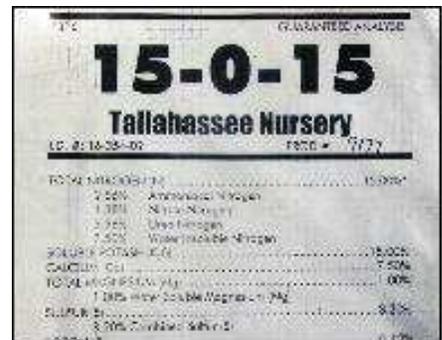
- Citrus County 352-527-5543
- Crystal River 352-795-4216, ext. 313
- Inverness 352-726-2321

Remember, the restrictions allow watering either in the morning or in the evening. Morning is preferable because plants are less likely to develop fungal problems when watered as close to sunrise as possible.

## Fertilizing

Fertilizer provides nutrients for plant growth. Choosing fertilizers wisely, with the specific nutrients needed, will help your landscape develop as you intend – to encourage new green growth, blooms or more fruit. Many plants, particularly natives, are well-adapted to Florida's nutrient-deficient soils, so if you are happy with your plants' health and appearance, fertilization may be unnecessary.

Approximately two-thirds of Citrus County residents do not need to add additional phosphorus in the form of fertilizer because they already have enough naturally-occurring phosphorus in their soil; see page 6 for soil testing instructions to find out your phosphorus levels. Nitrogen and phosphorus are water pollutants so it's especially important to not over-apply these nutrients. On a fertilizer label, the first number represents the percentage of nitrogen in the bag, the second number refers to phosphorus and the third number refers to potassium. For example, the pictured bag of fertilizer contains 15% nitrogen, 0% phosphorus and 15% potassium.



Do not use more than the recommended amount of fertilizer. Slow-release fertilizers make nutrients available to plants over a longer period of time but excess fertilizer (whether slow-release or quick-release) can pollute our water supply no matter where we live. We all live on “waterfront property” because leaching and runoff can carry fertilizer into our water supply, even if we live miles from a water body. When using any fertilizer, use it wisely and according to the package directions. “More” is not better – in fact, excessive fertilization and irrigation makes plants more vulnerable to some insects and diseases. The objective is to give plants the right amount and type of fertilizer in a way they can use and to avoid allowing polluting runoff into our water bodies.

## Composting

Citrus County's sandy soils are generally low in nutrients and moisture because they lack humus (also called organic matter or compost). Humus is recently living matter that has decomposed (leaves, pine needles, animal waste, etc.); it's what makes a soil “rich.” In dry conditions, compost can trap moisture where plants need it: in the root zone. Increased soil moisture reduces plant watering needs and decreases drought stress -- beating the watering restrictions legally!

To improve the soil with compost, till two to three inches of compost into the top six inches of the soil before planting. Do not add compost only to the planting hole because this will discourage the plant from sending its roots out any further. For established landscapes,

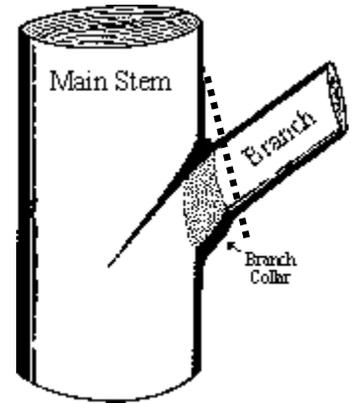
apply half-inch top dressings (even over grass) multiple times. Compost can be purchased in bulk for such large projects.

### Trimming and pruning

Plants store necessary nutrients and water in their leaves. Never prune more than one-third of a plant at once, because the leaves are its food source.

Other rules for pruning are:

- Don't prune new plants until they have been in the ground for at least one year.
- Don't use a wound dressing; this can seal moisture and disease into the wound.
- Don't prune branches flush to the trunk. Look for the branch collar (a swelling of bark around the limb) and cut parallel to and outside of it (see diagram). The branch collar contains healing tissue necessary to seal the pruning wound.
- Pruning healthy plant parts should be done only from mid-March through early October. Pruning (and fertilizing) during winter can force new growth that may suffer cold damage.
- Diseased, dead, damaged and insect-infested plant parts can be pruned at any time.
- Palms are especially vulnerable to over-pruning. Never remove green fronds because the green color means that the frond is providing vital nutrients that the palm requires. As the nutrients are removed from the frond, the frond turns yellow and it can be removed if necessary, but bear in mind that the frond still contains some vital nutrients. Brown fronds can be safely removed without disrupting the palm's food source.



### Pest control in your landscape

What are "pests" in your landscape? They could be insects, fungus/diseases or weeds. For each, there are basic guidelines for prevention and treatment.

- **Insects**

Insects love tender, weak growth that results from over-fertilization and over-irrigation. Avoiding these practices can go a long way in preventing infestations in the first place.

Become familiar with beneficial insects and identify specifically what's in your landscape. Be tolerant and allow beneficials to do their jobs. If control is necessary, start with a non-toxic method, like hand-picking or spraying pests off with a blast of water or removing the infected plant part.

Other Florida-friendly methods include use of horticultural oils and insecticidal soaps. For best use, be sure to follow the package directions when using these and all other garden products.

Environmentally safe commercial pesticides can be found at local retailers. Remember, the label is the law. Apply at recommended rates.

Visit the University of Florida's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) website at <http://ipm.ifas.ufl.edu/> for more information. IPM is a sustainable approach to managing pests through biological, cultural, physical and chemical tools in a way that minimizes risks to the community.

When using a professional pest control company, do your homework. Get bids, check references and ask for a certificate of insurance and license (both are required by Florida law). Verify that the applicator is licensed by visiting <http://app1.flaes.org/ceu/> or calling the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at 850-921-4177. Refer to the University of Florida article "Selecting a Professional Pest Control Service" at [www.SolutionsForYourLife.org](http://www.SolutionsForYourLife.org) for more information.

- **Fungus and other growths**

Fungus requires water to thrive, so take a good look at your irrigation practices. Are you watering too much or too often? What time of day are you watering?

Watering after 6:00 p.m. can promote fungus because of insufficient drying time before nightfall. To reduce fungal problems, water early in the morning when dew is forming, between 4:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.

- **Weeds**

In landscape beds, maintaining a two to three inch layer of mulch will greatly help to suppress weeds. Hand-pulling of weeds is recommended for these areas.

Weeds develop in bare spots resulting from insufficient care; a healthy, dense lawn will crowd out weeds. If weeds are a problem, take a look at your maintenance practices: how high you're mowing the lawn (taller grass encourages a deeper root system and helps to shade weed seeds and keep them from germinating), frequency of chemical applications (can stress the lawn and allow weeds to invade), your soil (is there adequate humus/compost to trap moisture in the root zone allowing grass to thrive?), etc.

Identify weeds so you can select the correct product for their control. Weeds are classified in two ways: growth habit (broadleaf, grass or sedge/rush) and life cycle (annual, biennial or perennial). Identify the weed by its growth habit and its life cycle to obtain the correct control product, then spot-treat only the affected areas rather than applying an unnecessary "blanket" application.

Apply weed control products only at recommended rates. If weed control chemicals are not taken up by the plants (for example, due to over-application), those chemicals can end up in the water we drink.

## **6. EXPANSION OF MULCHED BEDS**

*How do I get the old grass out so that I can expand mulched planting beds?*

To expand mulched planting beds, mechanical removal (manual or using machinery) of undesirable grass is the fastest way to get the job done without using herbicides.

For small areas, a grape (grubbing) hoe is a terrific tool for removing turf or use a flat-edge spade. A person with a strong back and a helper to cart away the old turf pieces can remove up to 300 square feet in an hour. For large areas, a sod cutter or sod kicker is needed. It slices under the grass, allowing long strips of old turf to be pulled up. Placing newspapers or plastic over the turf to kill it is time-consuming and unsightly, and may not eliminate all of the plant material. Check with your community association regarding restrictions on methods of turf removal/replacement.

Additional preparation of the soil is recommended before installing new turf or other plants, such as incorporating compost into the soil to hold moisture and add nutrients.

## **7. RIGHT-OF-WAY AND COMMUNITY DEED RESTRICTIONS**

*What special rules do I need to observe when planning my landscaping?*

Communities must observe specific local right-of-way restrictions. Your association can inform you about constraints regarding placement of plants or other landscaping elements in reference to utility, county or municipal rights-of-way. Your community's deed restrictions or other documents may also address landscaping rules or guidelines for residential and/or common properties. Check your documents and community rules before planning landscaping changes, and talk with a community association board member first if you have questions.

A Florida statute, effective July 1, 2009, gives homeowners greater rights to implement Florida-friendly landscaping on their properties, and requires water management districts to work with local governments and organizations to promote these practices.

Section 373.185 Florida Statutes, "Florida-friendly landscaping ordinances", defines Florida-friendly landscaping as "quality landscapes that conserve water, protect the environment, are adaptable to local conditions, and are drought tolerant."

Paragraph (3)(a) of the law states: "The Legislature finds that the use of Florida-friendly landscaping and other water use and pollution prevention measures to conserve or protect the state's water resources serves a compelling public interest and that the participation of homeowners' associations and local governments is essential to state's efforts in water conservation and water quality protection and restoration."

Paragraph (3) (b) states, in part: "A deed restriction or covenant may not prohibit or be enforced so as to prohibit any property owner from implementing Florida-friendly landscaping on his or her land...." And paragraph (3)(c) states: "A local government ordinance may not prohibit or be enforced so as to prohibit any property owner from implementing Florida-friendly landscaping on his or her land."

## 8. MORE REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

*I want more information and to see photographs. Where can I go?*

An excellent overall reference is *A Guide to Florida-Friendly Landscaping: Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Handbook*. This publication is available at [www.WaterMatters.org](http://www.WaterMatters.org) (see the “free publications” section). You can download it or order one free copy.

The handbook is also available from the Citrus County UF/IFAS Extension at 3650 W. Sovereign Path, Lecanto, FL 34461. Hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Telephone number is 352-527-5700. The Citrus County UF/IFAS Extension also offers landscaping courses throughout the year and individual consultation any time by telephone, email and office visit. You can also visit the Florida-Friendly Learning Landscape behind the Extension Office, seven days a week from sunrise to sunset. The Learning Landscape demonstrates the nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles through an irrigation display, mulch display, labeled plant specimens and more.

### WEBSITES

- [www.FloridaYards.org](http://www.FloridaYards.org) – interactive plant database selects plants suited to your yard, hundreds of color photographs of Florida-friendly plants
- <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu> – University of Florida’s website for the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ program
- [www.SolutionsForYourLife.org](http://www.SolutionsForYourLife.org) – University of Florida’s database of information, including plant selection/maintenance, irrigation, pest management and more
- <http://citrus.ifas.ufl.edu> – Citrus County UF/IFAS Extension website, including articles, quarterly newsletter and upcoming classes/programs
- [www.WaterMatters.org](http://www.WaterMatters.org) – Southwest Florida Water Management District: order free educational materials and view watering restrictions
- <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu> – UF’s Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants
- <http://ipm.ifas.ufl.edu> – UF’s Integrated Pest Management (IPM) website
- <http://treesandhurricanes.ifas.ufl.edu> – UF website covering selection of storm-resistant plants and hurricane issues in the landscape
- [www.pa.citrus.fl.us/](http://www.pa.citrus.fl.us/) – Citrus County Property Appraiser’s Office: get lot dimensions and an aerial view of your property for developing a landscape base plan
- [www.afnn.org](http://www.afnn.org) – Association of Florida Native Nurseries: find native plant nurseries
- [www.fisstate.org](http://www.fisstate.org) – Florida Irrigation Society: verify licensing of irrigation contractors