

A guide to Environmentally Friendly Landscaping

Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Handbook

Create a Florida-friendly Yard

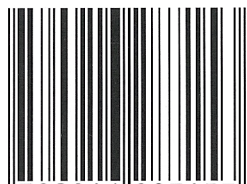
Your yard is the first line of defense for Florida's fragile environment.

Yards and landscapes can be an asset to Florida. Design and maintain a Florida-friendly yard by following the simple, common sense practices in this book. You'll save time and money as you learn the basics of designing a landscape featuring carefully selected plants suited to Florida's climate, natural conditions and wildlife.

Tips on cost-saving, environmentally-friendly landscape practices help you reduce water, fertilizer and pesticide use. A helpful section for waterfront homeowners addresses shoreline management. And you'll also get tips for working with your neighbors to share costs and work.

Whether you're starting from scratch with a new landscape or considering changes to an existing yard, the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Handbook offers helpful concepts, tools and techniques for creating your own Florida-friendly yard.

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**FLORIDA
YARDS &
NEIGHBORHOODS**



TO: Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program Participants

FROM: Mark Shelby, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent *MS*

DATE: June 2003

SUBJECT: General Information About Certified Florida Yards

Thank you for your interest in the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FY&N) Program. This citizens' education and action program grew out of research conducted by the Natural Estuary Programs of Sarasota and Tampa Bays. Their research indicates that 54% of the nitrogen pollution entering our bays and estuaries comes from stormwater run-off, with 60% of that runoff nitrogen coming from residential landscapes. Nitrogen pollution reduces available oxygen in the water and promotes excessive algae growth which shades out sea grass. Pesticides, soil erosion, heavy metals, and rapid run-off also contribute to the decline of our bays.

To correct this situation, the **Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program** was created. This multi-faceted program is administered through the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS). The components of the program include:

- A self-help assistance program for homeowners which provides literature and advice by trained volunteer Master Gardeners (called Florida Yard Advisors);
- Model Florida Yards throughout the community to demonstrate and promote appropriate landscape design and maintenance;
- Florida School yards, which involves teachers and students in improving the environmental quality of their schools and campuses;
- An educational campaign to market Florida Yards & Neighborhoods concepts;
- Working with the landscape industry to make the entire infrastructure of landscape design, development, sales and maintenance more environmentally responsive.
- Outreach efforts to the commercial development and construction industry and to multi-family associations to affect FY&N principles in their areas

Your participation better enables us to provide you with appropriate and specific advice for your landscape. If you desire to have a **Certified Florida Yard**, please fill out the attached Checklist and return it to us. Our office will assign a Florida Yard Advisor to contact you to verify your ability to obtain this status. If your landscape is acceptable as a Certified Florida Yard, the Florida Yard Advisor will grant certification and will leave a Certified Florida Yard sign with you. **When you return your Checklist, please keep this cover letter.**

Certain conditions apply concerning the status of Certified Florida Yard:

- Qualifying landscapes must be free of locally-banned invasive exotic plants (Melaleuca, Australian Pine, Brazilian Pepper, Chinese Tallow, Carrotwood, Beach Naupaka) and state-banned aquatic species (such as Water Hyacinth, Water Lettuce and Hydrilla).
- Certified Florida Yards must meet the standards of the community in which they are located (specifically, deed restrictions and homeowner association rules).
- Additionally, Certified Florida Yards should be attractive to the general public. Please remember that part of the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program is designed to promote responsible landscape and irrigation design, installation and management. This is better accomplished through attractive landscapes which would be found acceptable to your neighbors.
- These landscapes should not be sprayed with pesticides or herbicides on a preventative basis.
- Lawns should be minimized as much as possible within deed restrictions.

Should you have any questions about the questionnaire or if you need to reach the Sarasota County Extension Service, please contact us.

Two appropriate websites of interest are:

Sarasota County Cooperative Extension Service - <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu>

Florida Yards & Neighborhoods - <http://hort.ufl.edu/fyn>

Facilities to which Checklist can be returned:

University of Florida/IFAS Extension, Sarasota County

2900 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota, Fl. 34237

Phone: (941) 861-9800, FAX (941) 316-1005

OR

Cooperative Extension Satellite Service

has scheduled days and times at selected locations:

Elsie Quirk Library, Englewood - Tuesday mornings, 9:30 - Noon

North Port Library, North Port - Tuesday afternoons, 1:30 - 3:30

Venice Library, Venice - Thursday mornings, 9:30 - Noon

Jacaranda Library, Venice - Thursday afternoons, 1:30 - 3:30

OR

Florida House Learning Center

4600 Beneva Road South, Sarasota, Fla. 34233

May-November: Open Tuesday - Friday, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.; Saturday, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

December-April: Open Tuesday - Friday, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.; Saturday, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 Phone: _____

Evaluated by: _____
 Date: _____

FLORIDA YARD CERTIFICATION CHECKLIST

The Florida YardStick Checklist is a companion to *The Florida YardStick Workbook*. Check off the actions which apply to your yard. When you have 36 inches worth of actions, return this form to have your yard certified as a *Florida Yard*. Please note that some actions are mandatory for certification as noted below.

Yards must receive full points on actions with double asterisks ().**

Yards must receive at least partial credit on actions with single asterisks (*).

Page numbers following actions refer to *The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Handbook*. (To save space with the checklist the wording of some actions have been abbreviated. See *The Florida YardStick Workbook* for the complete listing of each action.)

RIGHT PLANT - RIGHT SPOT

- Reduce the need for water, fertilizer, pesticides and pruning by using plants suited to site conditions. 2" _____
- Group plants according to their maintenance needs. (p. 11) 2" _____
- Determine how much grass you need for children, pets and recreation. Use low-maintenance ground covers, shrubs, mulch or other porous surface where possible. (p. 16-18) 3" _____
- Save energy—use trees and shrubs to shade the air conditioner compressor and eastern & western walls. 1" _____
- Use deciduous trees or shrubs on southern exposures to allow sun to passively heat your home in the winter. 1" _____
- ** Help stop the spread of invasive exotic plants by removing them from you yard." (p. 16) 2" _____
 (In Sarasota County, a Florida Yard cannot contain the following: Melaleuca, Brazilian pepper, Australian pine, Beach Naupaka, Carrotwood and Chinese tallow.)
- Reduce yard waste by choosing plants that will not require frequent pruning when they reach maturity. 1" _____

Total: _____ inches

WATER EFFICIENTLY

- Design & maintain a landscape that exists predominately on rainfall once plants are established. 6" _____
- Water your lawn & other plants only when they show signs of stress. (p. 35) (Comply watering restrictions.) 3" _____
- ** Calibrate your sprinkler(s) to apply ½ to ¾ inches water. (p. 35) 3" _____
- * Mow lawns high to encourage a deeper, more drought & pest tolerant root system. (p. 36, 40) 2" _____
- Put a rain gauge in your yard to track irrigation amounts. (p. 20) 2" _____
- For yard that uses an irrigation system (in-ground or hose-end sprinklers):**
- Connect an automatic rain shut-off device to your sprinkler system timer. Set device to ½ inch. Replace back-up batteries in timer each year. Check to see if the shut-off device is working properly. (pg. 34) 2" _____
- Design or modify your sprinkler system to water lawn areas separately from plant beds. (p. 33) 2" _____
- Use a drip or micro-spray irrigation system in plant & flower beds. (p. 35) 2" _____

Total: _____ inches

MULCH

- * Maintain a 2-3" layer of organic mulch over the roots of trees, shrubs, and in plant beds. Leave at least a 2" space between the mulch and the plant's trunk or stem. (p. 38) 2" _____
- Replenish mulch once or twice a year, as needed to maintain a 2-3" depth. 1" _____
- Create self-mulching areas under trees where leaves can stay where they fall. (p. 38) 1" _____
- Use by-product or alternative mulches or recycled mulches when available. (p. 38) 2" _____

Total: _____ inches

RECYCLE

- * Recycle grass clippings by leaving them on the lawn. (p. 36) 2" _____
- Use fallen leaves & pine needles as mulch under trees and shrubs. (p. 38) 2" _____
- Create & maintain a compost pile with kitchen scraps and yard waste. (p. 29-30) 3" _____

Total: _____ inches

FERTILIZING

- * Fertilize only as needed to maintain the health of lawns and landscape plants. (p. 31, 32) 2" _____
- * Use slow-release fertilizers. Buy fertilizers with 30% or more of the nitrogen in slow-release forms. (p. 31) 2" _____
- Use iron instead of nitrogen to make your lawn green during the summer. (p. 32) 1" _____

Total: _____ inches

YARD PESTS

- Check plants regularly. Walk around yard every week & observe plants and lawn for problems. (p. 39, 41) 2" _____
- Avoid routine applications of pesticides. Treat only affected areas rather than spraying entire yard. (p.42) 3" _____
- Know five beneficial insects that provide natural control of harmful pests. (p. 45) 2" _____
- Use environmentally friendly pesticides such as horticultural oils & insecticidal soaps. (p. 42) 3" _____
- Whenever possible use non-chemical approaches to pest control, such as pruning off affected areas, hand-removing insects, etc. 3" _____

Total: _____ inches

STORMWATER RUNOFF

- * Where possible, direct downspouts & gutters to drain onto lawn, plant beds or containment areas. (p. 24, 25) 1" _____
- * Decrease soil erosion by planting groundcovers where grass doesn't thrive. (p. 17) 2" _____
- Use mulch, bricks, flagstones, gravel or other porous surfaces for walkways, patios and drives. (p. 27) 1" _____
- Collect and store rain runoff from your roof in a rain barrel or cistern. (p. 26) 2" _____
- Create swales (low areas) or terracing to catch, hold and filter stormwater. (p. 25) 3" _____
- Pick-up after pets. This will help reduce bacterial and nutrient pollution entering stormdrains. 1" _____
- Clean up oil spills and leaks on the driveway. Use cat litter instead of soap and water. 2" _____
- Sweep grass clippings, fertilizer and soil from driveways and streets back onto the lawn. Remove trash from street gutters before it gets washed into stormdrains. 2" _____

Total: _____ inches

WILDLIFE

Plant vines, shrubs & trees that provide cover, nesting areas or food for birds, butterflies and other wildlife. (p. 15, 19 & 21)

Provide a water source, such as a bird bath or a small pond for wildlife. (p.21-23)

Provide wildlife shelters such as a bat house, bird house, brush pile, or a dead tree..

3" _____
1" _____
1" _____

Total: _____ inches

ON THE WATERFRONT – Where applicable

Remove invasive exotic aquatic plants by cutting, pulling or raking. After using herbicides, remove dead plant material from the water to reduce pollution.

Decrease wave action & increase habitat by placing native limestone rock in front of seawall. (p. 50, 51)

** Protect your native shoreline plants. (p. 52)

Establish a 10-30 foot "no fertilizer, no pesticide zone along your shoreline. (p. 50)

If possible, plant a border of low-maintenance plants between you lawn and shoreline/seawall.

Where possible, plant native vegetation in front of your seawall or along shoreline. (p. 50)

2" _____
3" _____
1" _____
2" _____
2" _____
4" _____

Total: _____ inches

Note: Florida Yard Certification is contingent upon compliance with existing codes and laws.

Page 2 Total: _____ inches

+ Page 1 Total: _____ inches

= GRAND TOTAL: _____ inches

Thank you for checking how your landscape measures up. To have your yard certified as a *Florida Yard*, complete the checklist, fold so that the return address is visible, put on a stamp, and mail. Feel free to call Dee Cissel, Horticulture program Assistant, at 861-9800, with questions about creating your *Florida Yard*.

Your
Stamp

**FLORIDA YARDS & NEIGHBORHOODS
SARASOTA CO. COOP. EXTENSION SERVICE
2900 RINGLING BLVD.
SARASOTA, FL 34237**

Does Your Yard Measure Up?

Use this checklist to see if your lawn and garden care and design practices measure up to a Florida Yard.



THE FLORIDA YARDSTICK WORKBOOK



Does your yard measure up?

By following the simple steps inside you can save time and money, make your yard the best it can be, and protect Florida's environment.

Florida Yards & Neighborhoods



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

THE FLORIDA YARDSTICK WORKBOOK

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Acknowledgments

Florida Yards & Neighborhoods, a program of the University of Florida Extension Service, focuses on how yard care and design practices affect the environment.

Many agencies provide funding and other forms of support to Florida Yards & Neighborhoods. These include the National Estuary Programs of Florida, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Water Management Districts, and local water and stormwater utilities. Special thanks to UF Extension faculty and staff, Master Gardeners, Florida Yard Advisors, FYN statewide programmatic staff, FL114 ELM Committee, FYN subcommittee, and the University of Florida Environmental Horticulture Department.

Editors: Christine Kelly-Begazo, Bart Schutzman
Design: Tracy Copes, McShane & Moore Communications, Tampa

Does Your Yard Measure Up?

6

5

4

3"-4" Good height for St. Augustine and Bahia lawns

3

2"-3" Ideal depth for mulch

2

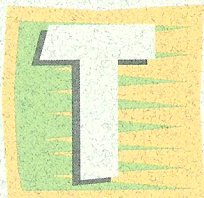
1 1/2" Good height for Bermuda and Centipede lawns

1

1/2-3/4" The amount of water plants need per application

Every inch makes a difference. Whether it's mulching, mowing your lawn or calibrating your irrigation system, a simple ruler can help you do it right.

INTRODUCTION



There's no doubt about it. Successful garden and lawn care in Florida requires special knowledge and skills. *The Florida YardStick Workbook* and its companion, *A Guide to Environmentally Friendly Landscaping: The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Handbook*, show you how to create attractive and healthy yards by working with Florida's environment, rather than against it.

This *Workbook* guides you through an evaluation of your yard and yard care practices. Each action you take (or have already taken) earns you inches or credits on the Florida YardStick. **A yard that measures up to at least 36 inches is a Florida Yard!** What is the payoff? A yard that meets your needs, enhances your neighborhood and helps protect Florida's beauty and natural resources.

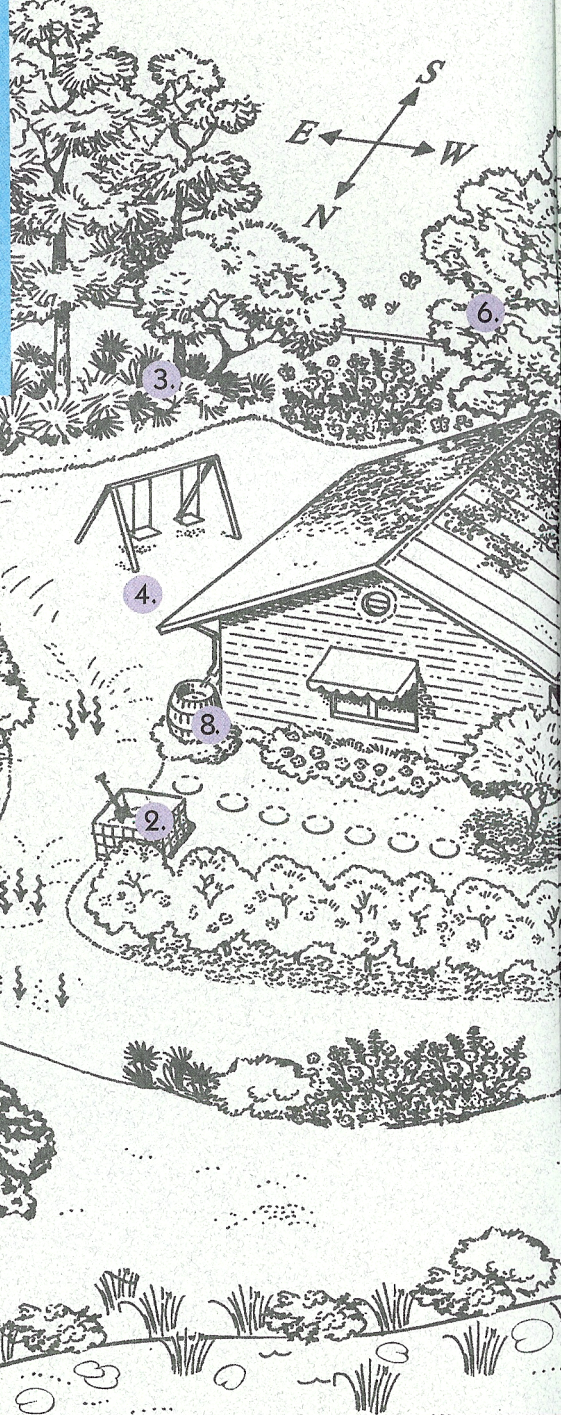
You can use this *Workbook* in two ways.

You can first read the *FY&N Handbook* and then evaluate your yard and yard care practices. Or you can start with the *Workbook* and use the *Handbook* as a reference. The Horticulture staff and volunteers at your county's Extension office can provide you with more information and answer questions. They can also tell you about additional services they may provide such as diagnostic tests, workshops, and on-site resources.

Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day and neither is a Florida Yard. Take this adventure a step at a time and have fun!



With a Florida Yard you win and so does Florida's environment. You don't waste water, fertilizers or pesticides, and Florida's lakes, rivers, bays and wildlife are protected for generations to come.



The Nine Principles of the FYN Program:

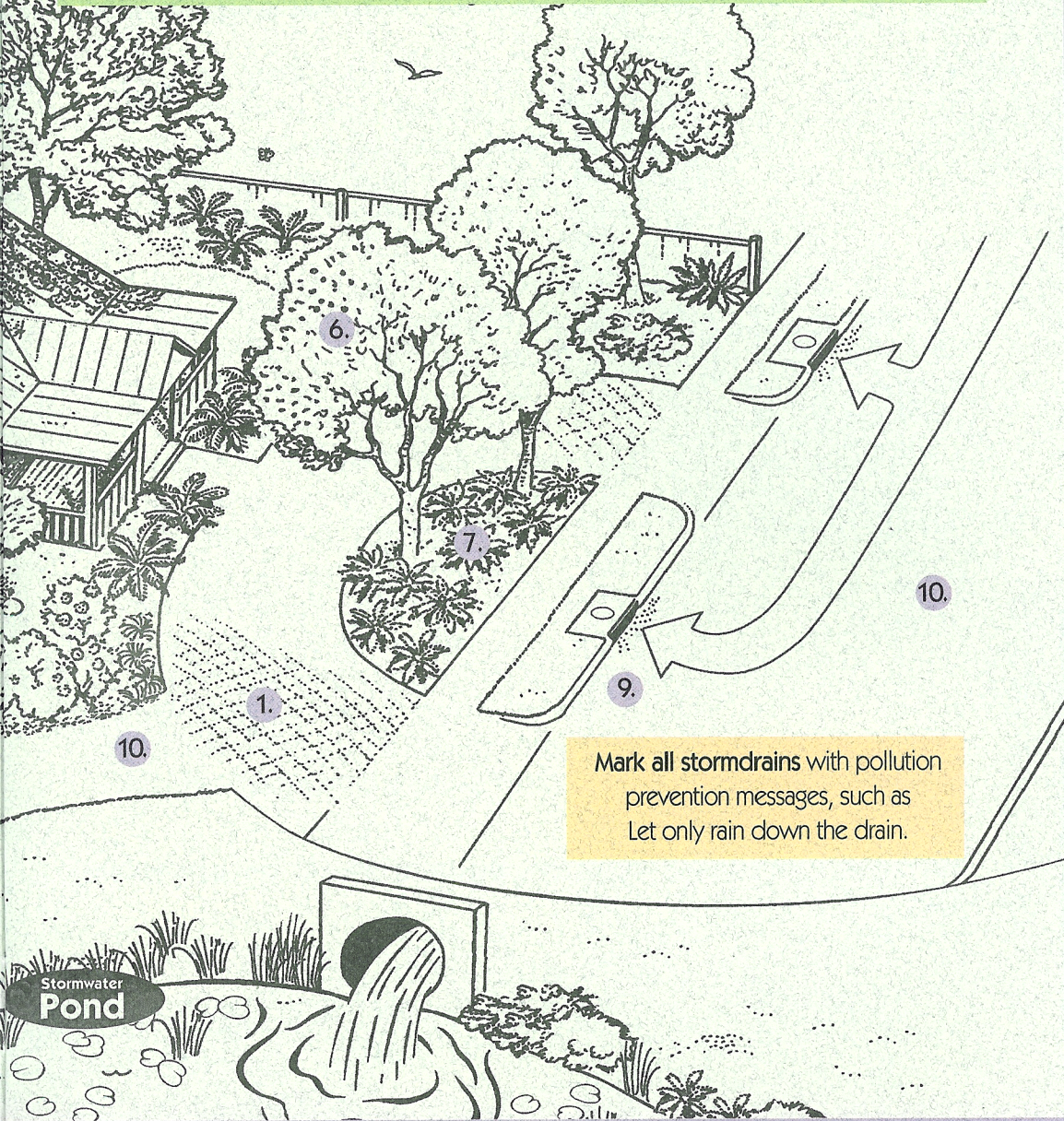
1. Reduce stormwater runoff
2. Recycle
3. Attract wildlife
4. Right plant, right place
5. Protect the shoreline
6. Mulch
7. Fertilize appropriately
8. Water efficiently
9. Manage pests responsibly

Actions to Take:

1. Porous surfaces, such as brick driveways and mulch paths allow water to soak into the ground
2. Compost bin
3. Wildlife habitat
4. Practical lawn area
5. Native plant buffer along shoreline

What does a Florida Yard Look Like?

A Florida Yard can take any form — unique or traditional. In fact, you can create a Florida Yard simply by changing the way you take care of your yard.



6. Trees to shade southern and western sides of home
7. Mulched plant beds
8. Rain barrel
9. Stormwater runoff from street filtered before dumping into nearest body of water
10. Use swales to keep rainwater where it falls

Right Plant, Right Place



ood landscape design hinges on one basic concept—the right plant planted in the right place. Careful planning and site evaluation are the first steps in applying this concept. The following checklists will guide you through some important considerations and decisions you should make when designing a landscaped area.

Resist (for now) the temptation to rush out and purchase plants. That will come later! If you have an in-ground sprinkler system or are planning to put one in, make sure the designs for the landscape and sprinkler system match each other. Better yet, select plants based on ability to survive and thrive on rainfall alone.

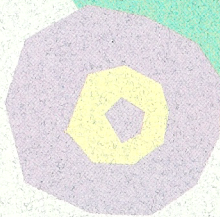
Florida is a diverse state which includes different climatic zones. Soil types, temperature ranges and rainfall patterns are dramatically different from region to region. A plant that thrives in a friend's yard on the coast may freeze in your yard just a few miles inland. Different conditions often exist in the same yard, creating microclimates. The front yard may be high and dry, while the backyard may be poorly drained and soggy.

Once you know your site conditions and have decided how you will use your yard, you are ready to begin with the step of plant selection. Your county Extension office has resources to help you with your selections. Prioritize your landscape projects, and then work on them one at a time in order to make the best possible use of resources.

1. Determine your needs for a particular area. (A few suggestions)

- Play area for children
- Vegetable/Herb/Fruit garden
- Screen home from road or neighbors
- Wildlife habitat/Butterfly garden
- Water garden/Aquascape
- Sitting garden
- Area for entertaining
- Pet area
- Storage area
- Pool, spa, hot tub
- Outdoor barbecue area
- Showcase the home

Right plant, right place:
Plant selection is
determined by individual
site characteristics.



2. Determine how much maintenance you want to put into your yard .

(Time needed for mowing, pruning, and weeding. Requirements for water, fertilizer and pesticides.)

- High
- Medium
- Low

3. Determine the site conditions in your yard.

- North Florida
- Central Florida
- South Florida

- sandy
- marl
- clay

- full shade
- partly shaded
- sunny

- well-drained soil
- poorly drained soil
- compacted soil

- alkaline soil
- acidic soil
- coastal soil

Your county's Extension office can give you information on how to collect a soil sample for a pH, soluble salts, or complete analysis test.

FLORIDA YARD ACTIONS

- Reduce the need for water, fertilizer, pesticides and pruning by using plants suited to the site conditions in your yard. Credit: 2 inches.
- Group plants according to their maintenance needs (For example, group drought-tolerant plants with low-water needs separately from lawn areas). Credit: 2 inches.
- Determine how much grass you need for children, pets and recreation. Use low-maintenance ground covers, shrubs, mulch or other porous surfaces where possible. Credit: 3 inches.
- Save energy by using trees and shrubs to shade the air conditioner compressor and eastern and western walls of your home. Credit: 1 inch.
- Use deciduous trees or shrubs on southern exposures to allow sun to passively heat your home in the winter. Credit: 1 inch.
- Help stop the spread of invasive exotic plants by removing them from your yard. (Examples . . . Brazilian Pepper, Melaleuca, Australian Pine, and Chinese Tallow). Credit: 2 inches.
- Reduce yard waste by choosing plants that will not require frequent pruning when they reach maturity. Credit: 1 inch.
- Preserve native plants, especially trees, when building on a new site. Maintain a protective do not disturb barrier under the dripline of trees. Credit: 3 inches.

Total Inches

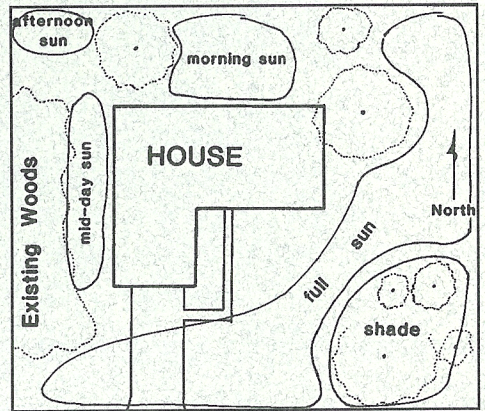
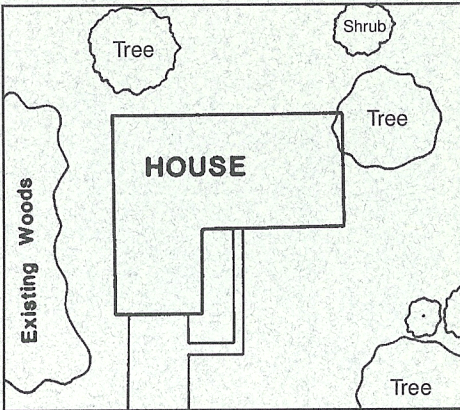
Right Plant, Right Place

Choose among plants with these characteristics to reduce maintenance:

- ___ drought tolerant
- ___ shade tolerant
- ___ slow growing shrubs
- ___ pest tolerant
- ___ freeze tolerant
- ___ ground covers
- ___ salt tolerant in coastal or marshy areas

4. Create your design plan.

Follow the landscape design steps in the *FY&N Handbook* to draw plans similar to those below. You can use the graph paper provided on pages 8 and 9 in this workbook. Be sure to indicate where activities will take place, future plans for additions to the home, and space for children and pets. Don't forget to add irrigation zones if you have an in-ground system.



First indicate existing plants, then note site conditions, including number of hours of sun in each area.

Utilizing UF extension bulletins, choose plants to meet all the conditions in your yard.





The Top Five Common Mistakes in Landscape Plantings

Mistake #1: Over-planting.

Small trees and shrubs are often planted too close together to get a full look. The result several years later is a crowded landscape that stresses plants. Plants must be removed or drastically pruned to reduce competition and increase air circulation.

Solution #1: Resist the temptation to have an instant landscape. Know the mature size of plants and give them room, and time, to grow into their proper mature size.

Mistake #2: Lawn areas are cluttered with trees and shrubs.

Plants scattered throughout the lawn appear unorganized. They also create maintenance problems in terms of mowing, raking, and giving plants the amount of water and fertilizer they need.

Solution #2: Group shrubs and trees according to their water and maintenance needs in mulched plant beds bordering the lawn.

Mistake #3: Shrubs around the home are too tall.

When plants grow too tall they cover windows and no longer enhance the home's appearance. We usually try to compensate for this mis-planting by shearing to control the plant size. This constant shearing weakens and disfigures shrubs. It also creates extra work and yard wastes.

Solution #3: Select foundation plants with an ultimate (mature) size that fits their location. Selectively clip stray shoots to keep the plant neat and full.

Mistake #4: Plants are planted too close to the house.

Plants too close to the house have an unattractive cramped look. They also create a maintenance nightmare when it's time to repair or paint the house.

Solution #4: Foundation or corner shrubs should be planted half their mature width plus one foot away from the wall. Therefore, a shrub that will grow to be five feet wide should be planted $3\frac{1}{2}$ ($2\frac{1}{2} + 1$) feet away from the house.

Mistake #5: Bright colors are scattered throughout the yard.

Brightly colored foliage, flowers or fruit attract attention. When brilliant color is scattered throughout the lawn it draws attention away from the focal point that the color was meant to emphasize.

Solution #5: Concentrate color where accent is desired. The goal is to attract attention to focal areas of the house. Do not add so many colors to the landscape palette that it takes away from the overall visual effect.

Create your design plan

