

Steps to a Florida-Friendly Landscape¹

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Introduction

A Florida-Friendly landscape is attractive, functional, and ecologically sound. Its creation and maintenance can be accomplished by using the landscape practices listed below. They are grouped according to how much money or labor they take to accomplish from easiest to most expensive and/or labor intensive. Even a simple practice—like raising the height on your lawn mower—can have significant, positive impacts on the landscape and the environment. The page number(s) that follow a practice refer to information in *Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Handbook for Home Landscapes* which is available free online at: https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fflifasufledu/docs/FFL-Handbook_03172022_web.pdf. You can also purchase printed copies at the IFAS Bookstore at: <http://ifasbooks.ifas.ufl.edu/p-1755-florida-friendly-landscaping-handbook-for-home-landscapes.aspx>.

A great place to get more information on a wide range of subjects including Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ is your local UF/IFAS Extension office. These branches of University of Florida can be found in each Florida county, and they are there to provide research-based information out to the community. To contact your local UF/IFAS Extension office, see: <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>.

Helpful websites from the University of Florida/IFAS are included in this publication that provide even more tips and practices to incorporate Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ into your yard, but the list below provides a good starting point.

Actions that require little to no money and/or labor

- Mow grass at the right height to encourage a deeper root system and a more pest-resistant stand of turfgrass. (Page 14)
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn to recycle nutrients back into the soil. (Page 53)
- Use fallen tree leaves and pine needles on-site as mulch. (Pages 37 and 57)
- Avoid shearing shrubs, topping trees, and over-pruning palms. (Pages 53–56)
- Make sure obstructed or misdirected sprinklers are correctly positioned. (Page 22) <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/SS586>
- Schedule a free irrigation inspection. Contact your local UF/IFAS Extension office or utility for availability of this service. <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>
- Manually operate your irrigation system on an as-needed basis, especially during winter months and the summer rainy season. Let the plants in the landscape tell you when your landscape needs to be watered. (Page 21)
- Properly schedule irrigation run times. See the Urban Irrigation Scheduler: http://fawn.ifas.ufl.edu/tools/urban_irrigation/. For information on how to set your irrigation controller, visit: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae220>.

1. This document is ENH1153, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date December 2009. Revised December 2009, September 2011, August 2014, March 2018, and February 2024. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.

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- Use a rain gauge to measure rainfall and irrigate only during prolonged dry periods. (Page 23)
- Regularly check rain or soil moisture sensors to make sure they are operating correctly. (Page 23 and 25) <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae221>
- Irrigate in the early morning hours when temperature and wind are low. (Page 22)
- Direct downspouts onto turf, plant beds, or containment areas where rainwater can be absorbed. (Page 62)
- Establish a minimum 10-foot-wide low-maintenance zone around any water bodies on the property. (Page 67)
- Use pesticides only on affected plants or lawn areas; no indiscriminate or routine pesticide use. (Page 46)
- Fertilize as needed rather than routinely (Pages 29, 32, and 33); follow local rules regarding fertilizer “black-out periods.” If fertilizer is needed, be sure to follow UF/IFAS guidelines.
- Tolerate some insect damage on plants; insects are a food source for beneficial insects, birds, and other organisms. Follow the principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) (Pages 45–46)
- Make sure landscape maintenance personnel hold required certifications for applying pesticides and fertilizers. <https://fl.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/hire-florida-friendly/>
- Prevent grass clippings, fertilizer, and other debris from going into storm drains and water bodies (Pages 15, 31, and 61).
- Avoid planting invasive plants in your landscape and consider removing any invasive plants that already exist on the site. (Pages 8, 10, and 11). <https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/>
- Repair broken or leaking sprinklers <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/AE472> (Page 22)
- Maintain a 2- to 3-inch layer of a Florida-Friendly organic mulch in plant beds. Pull mulch away from the base of plants. (Page 38)
- Use Florida-Friendly, organic mulches such as recycled yard waste, melaleuca, pine bark/straw, eucalyptus, tree leaves, etc. (Pages 37–38)
- Use slow- or controlled-release fertilizers. (Page 30)
- Add a deflector shield to your fertilizer spreader to help keep fertilizer off the street, sidewalk, driveway, and adjacent water bodies. (Page 31)
- Reduce mowing and raking by removing grass beneath tree canopies and creating large, “self-mulching” areas. (Page 57)
- Make a rain barrel to collect and store rainwater for use on plants. (Page 63) http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/water/articles/pdf/rain_barrels.pdf
- Bring your yard to life by creating habitat for Florida’s wildlife. (Pages 41–42) <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw175>
- Improve your soil by adding organic matter. (Page 6 and 57)
- Have your soil tested. (Page 7)
- Compost yard and kitchen debris. (Pages 57-58) <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep323>
- Choose “least harmful” products when a pesticide application is justified. (Page 46) <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in197>
- Help reduce insect pesticide resistance by rotating chemical classes of pesticides. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pi121>

Actions that require some money and/or labor

- Choose the right plant for the right place in your landscape. (Pages 4–17)
- Calibrate your irrigation system to apply ½–¾ inch of water per application. (Page 23)
- Install a rain shut-off device or soil moisture sensor to automatic irrigation systems. It is required by law. Check regularly for proper operation. (Pages 25 and 19) <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae221>; <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae437>
- Segregate irrigation zones to water lawn areas separately from plant beds. Lawns typically need more frequent irrigation than landscape plants. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh025>

Actions that require increased investments of money and/or labor

- If free irrigation inspections are not available in your area, hire a Florida Irrigation Society (FIS) “Water Auditor” to inspect your system. (See below for FIS contact information).
- Install microirrigation (such as drip or microsprays) in plant beds. (Page 24)
- Install a cistern for non-potable water use. (Page 63)

- Replace problem lawn areas and landscape plants with more appropriate choices. (Pages 4–17) Also see the *Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Guide to Plant Selection & Landscape Design*: https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fflifasufledu/docs/FFL-Plant-Guide_v03222022_web.pdf
- Plant deciduous trees on southern exposures to allow winter sun to passively heat buildings. (Pages 5 and 11)
- Plant shade trees on the east and west sides of buildings and around air conditioner compressors to passively cool buildings. (Pages 5 and 11)
- Reduce stormwater runoff and pollutants by using mulch or other porous surfaces (pavers, bricks, gravel, etc.) for patios, walkways, or driveways. (Page 62)
- Create swales, berms, terracing, and/or a rain garden to capture and filter stormwater runoff. (Pages 61-63)
- Plant native aquatic and wetland plants along the shoreline of water bodies. (Page 67) <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep476>
- Remove invasive exotic plants. (Pages 8 and 10)
- Consider Converting Your Yard to a Florida-Friendly Landscape (Page 71–72).

Pesticide (including herbicide) application:

verify pest control and pesticide licenses

Additional Resources

FFL website: <http://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu>

The Florida Friendly Landscaping Guide to Plant Selection & Landscape Design https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fflifasufledu/docs/FFL-Plant-Guide_v03222022_web.pdf

Hire Certified, Reputable and Responsible Professionals (Page 15) https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fflifasufledu/docs/GIBMP_Manual_Web_English.pdf and <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/hire-florida-friendly/>

The following is a list of Green Industry professional organizations:

Florida Irrigation Society: www.fisstate.org

Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association: <http://www.fngla.org/>

International Society of Arboriculture <http://www.isa-arbor.com/>

Florida Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects: <http://www.flasla.org/>

Florida Turfgrass Association: <http://www.ftga.org/>