

Landscaping Tips for Florida-Friendly and Wildlife-Friendly Yards

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Decrease the area of grass/turf and increase the area of landscaped beds or other ground covers. Mowed grass is generally high maintenance (fertilizer, pesticides, water) and of very low value to wildlife (no food, no cover).

Increase layering and variety in plants. Use trees, shrubs, and small annuals or perennials. The increased complexity in habitat will support more types and numbers of wildlife. But provide enough of each type of plant to be useful - keep it cohesive by grouping plants together.

Use native plants to reduce maintenance needs and provide better food sources for wildlife. Actively remove invasive plants. These overtake native plants and destroy more wildlife habitat each year than development!

Some animals require larger areas of suitable habitat than others. If you are fortunate enough to have like-minded neighbors try scaling habitats across yards. The more people on your street that design habitat for wildlife the more will come.

Reduce pesticide use. Accept some insects – they are the staple food for many birds. Even with feeders your yard will not support most species of birds if it is devoid of insects. Plus, some insects are essential pollinators in gardens and for crops. Deal with nuisance pests by spot treating, using pesticides that target specific pests, and using natural oils.

Provide water. Most animals require a fresh water source. This could be a pond, water fountain, or bird bath.

Provide bird feeders, especially when natural food sources are scarce. Place them near trees and bushes for refuge from predators, which are also attracted to feeding stations. Either place within a yard of windows or more than 30 feet away. Add mobiles, window decorations, or fruit tree netting will help prevent collisions.

Provide snags (dead standing trees). These are important for insectivorous birds and cavity nesters (those that nest in holes). They are essential for many woodpeckers, which will only nest in holes they drill themselves.

Provide bird and bat houses. Bird houses support cavity nesters that use pre-existing holes like bluebirds and chickadees. Bat houses provide bats with space to rest during the day. Bats help naturally reduce the insect population – they are voracious eaters. And because they feed at night they do not compete with most insect-eating birds. You can also construct simple treefrog houses in your garden to help naturally control insects!

Manage pets. Cats kill hundreds of millions of birds each year. Keep them inside for their safety and the safety of our wildlife.

Interested in doing even more? Use more environmentally friendly practices:

Mulch beds. A 2"-3" layer of mulch reduces water loss in the heat of summer, prevents erosion, and also suppresses weeds naturally.

Water efficiently: Irrigate only when your lawn and landscape need water. Overwatering can waste water, cause pollution, and makes plants more prone to disease and pests.

Water at sunrise. Its cooler so less water is lost to evaporation. Plus, it gives the plants a chance to dry out during the day reducing fungal infections.

Provide ½-¾ inches of water. Less promotes shallow roots; more runs off or drains below most of the root system or stagnates promoting rot.

Reduce watering in winter when grass is dormant. Skip watering in summer during rainy periods.

Fertilize appropriately: Less is often best. Overuse of fertilizers can be hazardous to your landscape and the environment. Excess fertilizer washes into the watershed where it promotes harmful algal blooms.

Skip fertilizing in the winter when grass is dormant.

Avoid fertilizing within 24-36 hours of rain to reduce washing the fertilizer away.

Choose a fertilizer that is low in Phosphorous ("P"; the middle number in the fertilizer formula). Most of our soils are naturally high in this nutrient – its why companies mine for it here! Nitrogen (N) and Potassium (K) levels should be about equal, the first and third numbers, respectively.

Choose a fertilizer with slow-release or timed-release nitrogen and fertilize less often. Slow release forms prevent this nutrient from washing away all at once after the first heavy rain.

Recycle: Use a mulching blade on your lawn mower! It's easier than bagging and better, too. Grass clippings, leaves, and yard trimmings recycled on-site provide nutrients to the soil and reduce waste disposal when reused on the landscape.

Protect the waterfront: Maintain a 10' "low-maintenance" zone between your yard and the waterfront, where fertilizers and pesticides are NOT applied.

Do not blow grass clippings and leaves into streets and storm drains. This is against the law in Pasco county. Even if you do not live on a waterfront lot this material will wash into ponds and waterways.