



## ELEVATE THE USE OF FLORIDA-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING™

Florida is experiencing and facing many environmental pressures. The headlines showcase the state's rapid population growth; water supply and quality issues; land conservation challenges; and, climate change impacts with rising temperatures and sea-levels.

To help mitigate these challenges, Florida's professional nursery and landscape industry has long played a meaningful role in delivering environmental and ecosystem benefits.

### LANDSCAPES DELIVER ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOSYSTEM BENEFITS

Landscapes, plants and trees can improve the soil, protect pollinators, shelter wildlife, prevent soil erosion and stormwater runoff, produce fresh, healthy food and bring our neighborhoods and communities together.<sup>1</sup>

Delivering a multitude of critically important environmental benefits and ecosystem services, landscapes can:

- **Sequester carbon, reduce its footprint and improve air quality**

Trees and healthy turfgrass remove carbon dioxide and produce oxygen which help to mitigate poor air quality.

- **Attract wildlife and promote biodiversity**

Cultivated landscapes and green spaces provide natural refuges for wildlife. Biodiversity is gained through landscapes, offering a healthy balance among ecosystems, people and wildlife habitats. Many plants are attractive for pollinators.

- **Cool urban heat islands**

Asphalt and cement absorb the sun's heat which raises temperatures. On the flip side, trees and plants absorb the sun's heat, producing shade and cool temperatures.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/faculty/hall/publications/JEH%2029\(2\)%2096-103.pdf](https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/faculty/hall/publications/JEH%2029(2)%2096-103.pdf)

- **Save energy and energy costs**

Strategically placed trees and plants around homes and buildings can reduce the sun's radiation effect on the temperature of outer walls and lower the energy costs for heating and cooling. Using less energy reduces the environmental impact of a home or building on its community.

- **Reduce stormwater runoff and improve water quality**

Trees, plants and turfgrass can reduce the amount of stormwater runoff after significant rain events. Landscaping is a naturally effective purification process helping to improve water quality.

- **Mitigate soil erosion**

The roots of trees and shrubs create an infrastructure below the surface helping to anchor the soil in place. Plant foliage, turfgrass and groundcover plants can help to reduce the amount of soil lost as dust in the air. Landscapes and other green spaces protect the soil's fertility by supplying natural nutrients and minerals enhancing plant life.

- **Lessen urban glare**

Landscapes can deflect or reduce sunlight's reflections off windows and buildings, so light pollution is less bright or harsh on drivers and pedestrians.

- **Lower noise pollution**

Landscapes can reduce the amount of noise pollution which can stress wildlife and alter their activity patterns.

- **Serve as protective windbreaks**

Trees and large shrubs can help to diminish wind speed which can otherwise damage natural areas and manmade structures. Reducing wind gusts can mitigate soil erosion which helps to retain soil health for new plant growth.

## **FLORIDA-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING™ IS SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING**

The terms 'sustainable' and 'resilient' are commonly used today. Floridians receive a lot of messaging to do things in good and sustainable ways for the environment. However, with so many different perceptions and interpretations, many Floridians are confused or frustrated as to what 'sustainable' really means.

To date, the term 'sustainable' is missing one central core element: a sense of place which could resonate with Floridians. Fortunately, a principled program already exists, laying out a menu of achievable, sustainable landscape actions which Floridians can understand and embrace: Florida-Friendly Landscaping™.

By its very nature, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ is the essence of sustainable landscaping. Even better, it is an unambiguous Florida-centric message. Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ offers some of the best, realistic solutions within the reach of most Floridians who desire to do good things in good ways for the environment.

What one does in the landscape matters. From the plants selected, to the fertilizers applied, and the irrigation used, gardening choices can have impacts on Florida's land, water, and wildlife. Florida residents can relate to the benefits of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™:

- Reduce use of water, fertilizer and pesticides, a measure which also saves money
- Properly select and maintain plants so they will thrive
- Provide habitats for birds, butterflies, pollinators, and other wildlife
- Help keep fertilizer out of Florida's waterways
- Provide designs for low and easy maintenance
- Protect the environment while also enjoying aesthetically pleasing plant palettes

The benefits highlighted above all flow from Florida-Friendly Landscaping's™ nine science-based sustainable principles<sup>2</sup>:

### **1. RIGHT PLANT, RIGHT PLACE**

This is the overarching principle of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ from which the other principles flow: Put the 'right plant in the right place.' Achieving healthy, low-maintenance landscapes starts with putting the right plants in the right places.' Plants must be selected to match a site's soil, light, water and climatic conditions.

'Right plant, right place' embraces Florida native plants and other plants which are water efficient, drought-tolerant, pest-resistant and easy to maintain. Attractive and sustainable, 'right plant, right place' is a wise approach to landscape management.

### **2. WATER EFFICIENTLY**

An efficient irrigation system conserves water and helps to ensure fertilizer and other nutrients do not flow into water bodies. The future of landscapes in Florida hinges on water availability. And, water availability hinges on professionals who maximize irrigation efficiency in Florida's residential and commercial landscapes.

### **3. FERTILIZE APPROPRIATELY**

Proper fertilization enhances plant growth and appearance, increases flowering or fruiting, and corrects nutritional deficiencies. Improper application or too much fertilization can damage plants and the environment.

### **4. MULCH**

Mulch helps retain soil moisture, protects plants and inhibits weed growth. It gives the landscape a neat, uniform appearance and is a great Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ choice for hard-to-mow areas and shady spots.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/about-ffl/9-principles/>

### **5. ATTRACT WILDLIFE**

Plants with foliage, flowers, berries or seeds produce food for pollinators and other wildlife. Sources of water, such as rain gardens and bird baths, can also be incorporated into Florida-Friendly Landscapes™.

### **6. MANAGE YARD PESTS RESPONSIBLY**

To prevent plant diseases and insect outbreaks, pest-resistant plants can be selected and placed in suitable locations. When problems do arise, one can use integrated pest management techniques, remove the affected leaves or plant parts, or even pick off the insects by hand.

### **7. RECYCLE YARD WASTE**

Decomposing organic matter releases nutrients back to the soil in a form which plants can easily use. Using yard waste for composting is a sustainable way of creating organic fertilizer.

### **8. REDUCE STORMWATER RUNOFF**

Fertilizer, pesticides, yard debris and eroded soil carried in stormwater can all wreak havoc on water quality. Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ seeks to retain and use as much as possible of the rainfall and irrigation water which falls on residential and commercial landscapes.

### **9. PROTECT THE WATERFRONT**

Florida boasts over 10,000 miles of rivers and streams, about 7,800 lakes, more than 700 freshwater springs and the second-longest coastline in the United States. By managing plant pests and diseases responsibly and fertilizing appropriately, Florida's waters can be better protected.

A tenth principle could perhaps even be added to the above list. Healthy soils typically have high water-holding capacity. So, enhancing compacted soils with appropriate amendments prior to starting landscape installation projects can help many landscape plants thrive with lower water footprints.

## **FLORIDA-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING™ EMBRACES NATIVE & NON-NATIVE PLANTS**

With the exception of plants proven to be invasive, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ does not arbitrarily exclude plants nor limit plant palettes. Florida-Friendly Landscaping's™ 'right plant, right place' principle is fully inclusive of both Florida native and non-native plants.

There are plenty of opportunities (e.g., wetland mitigations and upland restorations) when using only Florida native plants makes eminent sense. There are also plenty of opportunities (e.g., some residential and commercial projects) when only using non-native plants in the right places can make sense. And, there are plenty of opportunities when a mix of Florida native and non-native plants can often make the most sense.

A Florida-Friendly landscape can be designed to look the way one wants, fit the aesthetics of one's neighborhood or community and suit one's lifestyle - all while being environmentally sustainable. If Florida's nursery and landscape professionals and their clients adopt 'right plant, right place', maximize irrigation efficiencies, and match landscape plant intensities (high-medium-low), there will indeed be plenty of opportunities for both Florida native and non-native plants.

## **FLORIDA-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING™ OFFERS ACHIEVABLE BALANCE**

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ offers a straightforward consumer message which Floridians can understand and around which they can rally. With a Florida sense of place, Florida-Friendly Landscaping's™ sustainable, efficient and responsible actions offer an achievable balance marrying quality landscapes, environmental benefits and ecosystem services.

Even the Florida Legislature formally and explicitly recognizes Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ in Florida statute as meaning "quality landscapes that conserve water, protect the environment, are adaptable to local conditions, and are drought tolerant..."<sup>3</sup>

With its sustainable practices of less water, fewer chemicals, lower maintenance costs and better habitats for pollinators and other wildlife, Florida-Friendly landscapes can create balanced relationships between natural and manmade environments. Landscapes can be one of the most effective tools and investments in conserving Florida's water resources, protecting its beautiful natural resources, and creating healthy and inspiring places in which to live, work and play.

## **THE INDUSTRY HAS AN OUT-SIZED ROLE TO CONTINUE TO PLAY**

Florida's professional nursery and landscape industry has long played a meaningful role in delivering environmental and ecosystem benefits. By elevating the use of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, the industry can play an even larger out-sized role in delivering these benefits to Florida and its residents.

Here are actions which the industry needs to implement:

- Double-down to ensure landscape designs routinely honor and embrace the core horticultural principle of 'putting the right plants in the right places.'
- Develop and produce an expanding palette of aesthetically pleasing and larger-sized Florida native plants and trees to meet rising marketplace demand.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&URL=0300-0399/0373/Sections/0373.185.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0300-0399/0373/Sections/0373.185.html)

- Ensure projects are installed and maintained so as to continually maximize landscape irrigation efficiencies.<sup>4</sup>
- Convince builders, developers and landscape professionals on the need to collaborate in the early planning and design stages to ensure landscape soils start out healthy; and, to collaborate in the identification of appropriate plant-intensity mixes for residential landscapes, as well as community green spaces.
- Educate consumers and professionals to be inclusive of Florida native and non-native plants bred to be water-efficient, drought-tolerant, pest-resistant and easy to maintain.
- Develop best practices and, perhaps, even an FNGLA professional certification, to train landscape personnel in unique nuances so as to properly maintain Florida-Friendly landscapes.

As the industry tackles these rapidly expanding Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ opportunities, it will earn the respect and loyalty of the up-and-coming younger generations of plant buyers and homeowners. Millennials have already shown their willingness to pay more for companies and products seen as adding to the greater good.

Florida's nursery and landscape industry is exceptionally well-positioned to capitalize on doing more of the right things for all of the right reasons. And, it can do so profitably. The reasons are compelling and the opportunities are increasing.

In the eyes of consumers, influencers and policymakers, Florida's nursery and landscape industry's adoption and implementation of the sustainable practices of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ will continue to burnish the industry's professional credentials and showcase its laudable, long-term environmental stewardship. And, Florida's environment, natural resources and ecosystems will continue to benefit.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fn gla.org/advocacy/political-action-committee/LandscapeIrrigationPolicyBrief.pdf>