

What is Florida-Friendly Landscaping™?¹

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Overview

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) promotes science-based, low-impact, sustainable, environmentally friendly landscaping practices that conserve water, reduce pollutant loading to Florida waters, and protect Florida’s natural resources. The FFL program is centered around a science-based core of **9 FFL principles** (Table 1) for landscape design and maintenance that facilitate resilient, aesthetically pleasing landscapes. Once established, an FFL landscape requires little, if any, irrigation, fertilizer, or pesticides.

Table 1. The 9 Principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™

1. Right Plant, Right Place
2. Water Efficiently
3. Fertilize Appropriately
4. Mulch
5. Attract Wildlife
6. Manage Yard Pests Responsibly
7. Recycle Yard Waste
8. Reduce Stormwater Runoff
9. Protect the Waterfront

The FFL program is a partnership between the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), which has continuously funded the program since its start. Program funding consists of both state and federal grants. All federal funding is from US EPA Section 319 nonpoint source management grants authorized under Section 319h of the Clean Water Act.

Since 1993, FFL has served Florida citizens as a nonpoint source pollution prevention and water conservation program. FFL has grown and evolved to reach multiple target audiences that include residential homeowners, community builders/developers/property managers, and landscape professionals in the green industries.

FFL Subprograms and Target Audiences

As a UF/IFAS Extension program, FFL’s mission is to conduct public outreach that conveys the practical applications of the university’s science-based research on landscape design and best management practices to diverse

1. This document is ENH1343, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date July 2021. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
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target audiences located statewide, including homeowners, landscape professionals, homeowner associations, and local governments.

FFL is comprised of three component subprograms (Table 2) that each focus on meeting the landscaping needs of a specific target audience. The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN) program focuses on resources for individuals making decisions about their home landscapes, whether they are homeowners or renters who are responsible for maintaining their landscape at their rental property. The Florida-Friendly Communities (FFC) program specifically targets community-level decision makers such as homeowner associations (HOAs), community managers, the building and development industries, and local governments. The GI-BMP program provides landscape professionals with statutorily required training in landscaping best management practices as well as continuing education to a wider audience of landscape professionals.

Table 2. Florida-Friendly Landscaping’s three subprograms and associated target audiences

FFL Subprogram Title	Target Audience(s)
Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN)	Residential homeowners/renters
Florida-Friendly Communities (FFC)	Community Decision Makers Homeowner Associations (HOAs) Community Association/ Property Managers Home Builders/Developers Local Governments
Green Industries Best Management Practices (GI-BMP)	Landscape Professionals

FFL Public Outreach Pathways

FFL State Office

Effectively reaching FFL’s diverse target audiences requires multiple public outreach pathways. The overall FFL program is coordinated through the state office based at the UF campus in Gainesville, Florida. The main public outreach pathway for the FFL state office is a comprehensive website (<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>) that addresses all aspects of the FFL program. This website also provides links to all county-based FFL programs.

Figure 1 provides an organizational chart of the FFL state office programs and position titles. Figure 1 also illustrates the relationship between the UF/IFAS FFL program and its FDEP program partner. Additional high-level program input is received through the FFL Advisory Committee, which meets annually to review program effectiveness and priorities, as well as UF faculty advisors, who provide the

science-based expertise on which the FFL nine principles are founded.

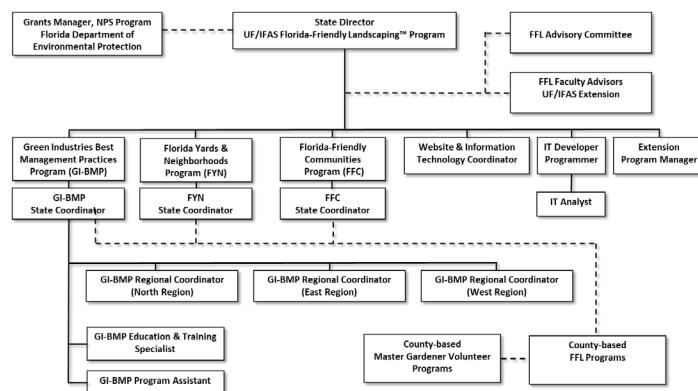


Figure 1. Organizational structure for FFL state office, University of Florida, Gainesville.

The primary mission of the FFL state office is to develop new program resources, update existing program resources, and ensure statewide consistency as the FFL program is implemented through county-based programs. The FFL state office works closely with county Extension programs and other partners to distribute printed copies of its two main publications:

1. The Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Guide to Plant Selection & Landscape Design (https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fllifasufledu/docs/FYN_Plant_Selection_Guide_2015.pdf)
2. The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Handbook (https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fllifasufledu/docs/FYN_Handbook_2015_web.pdf)

These and other FFL state office publications are also available online at <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/publications/>.

To further promote statewide consistency in FFL educational outreach, *The Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Curriculum Instructor Manual* provides Extension professionals and FFL educators a science-based, standard training curriculum detailing the nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles.

Specific outreach pathways for FFL’s main target audiences are detailed below.

Residential Homeowners

As of 2020, Florida already had some 20 million residents in nearly 8 million households; however, this population is projected to grow to nearly 26 million over the next two decades. The FYN program is the primary FFL contact point for residential homeowners and, in some cases,

renters who are responsible for maintaining a residential landscape. FYN public outreach occurs mainly through the county-based Extension programs, and Florida residents are encouraged to use their local UF/IFAS Extension agents as resources for their landscape questions and concerns. County Extension offices also routinely offer in-person or online classes on common landscape issues. The FFL website also provides additional access to resources for home landscapes.

Stakeholders for Community Landscapes

Community-level development and redevelopment significantly impact the availability and quality of Florida's water resources, and the FFC program is the primary FFL contact point for those who make such community-level decisions, particularly builders, developers, property managers, and local governments. FFC promotes the adoption of FFL principles and the implementation of [green stormwater infrastructure](#) (GSI).

FFC outreach and education is centered around the fundamental idea that FFL (including GSI techniques) is beneficial to a community aesthetically, economically, and environmentally. To convey this information, FFC relies on partnerships with professional organizations, presentations at workshops and conferences, web resources, and live and virtual continuing education units (CEUs).

FFC also provides model code development documents, including the following publications:

- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Model Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions for New and Existing Community Associations (https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fflifasufledu/docs/CCRs_Sept-20-2010_final.pdf)
- A list of considerations for Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ guidelines for architectural review boards (https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fflifasufledu/docs/ARB_FFL_consideration_guidelines03_23_2011.pdf)
- Model Ordinance for Florida-Friendly Fertilizer Use on Urban Landscapes (<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fflifasufledu/docs/dep-fert-modelord.pdf>)
- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Model Landscape Maintenance Contract (https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/fflifasufledu/docs/Florida_Friendly_Landscaping_Maintenance_Contract_2018.pdf)

Landscape Professionals

FFL outreach to landscape professionals focuses on providing resources and education for Florida-Friendly

Landscaping™ practices while meeting or exceeding the expectations set by clients in terms of aesthetics, frequency of maintenance, and cost. FFL strives to provide meaningful education to professionals that strengthens their skills in offering sustainable landscaping services. The primary public outreach methods to landscape professionals are the GI-BMP program, the FFLCP program, and an online continuing education curriculum that provides continuing education units (CEUs).

Green Industries Best Management Practices (GI-BMP) Certification

GI-BMP is a major component of the outreach efforts targeted at landscape professionals and provides mandatory training in landscape best management practices. The GI-BMP program targets all landscape professionals within Florida who apply fertilizer commercially as a landscaping business owner or landscaping crew member. In Florida, all such persons must have a Limited Urban Commercial Fertilizer Applicator's License from the Florida Department of Agriculture. To get this license, state statutes require that a green industry professional must first complete the UF/IFAS GI-BMP training and pass a comprehensive certification exam.

Being a required certification program for fertilizer applicators, GI-BMP training is one of the most effective ways the FFL program reaches landscape professionals. Classes are offered year-round throughout Florida through UF/IFAS Extension and affiliated partners. GI-BMP training consists of six modules covering all aspects of the FFL nine principles, but with a special emphasis on proper fertilizer application. The six GI-BMP training modules are:

1. Introduction
2. Best Management Practices for Design and Installation of Landscapes
3. Irrigation Best Management Practices
4. Mulching, Mowing, and Pruning
5. Fertilization
6. Pest Control

GI-BMP training is delivered through multiple outreach methods, including a traditional classroom setting with an in-person instructor, an online course, and a DVD-based course. In-person classes are offered in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. The online and DVD-based courses

are offered in English and Spanish. Statewide, there are some 250 active GI-BMP instructors comprised of UF/IFAS Extension agents and green industry professionals.

Up-to-date information regarding the GI-BMP program is always available online at <https://fpl.ifas.ufl.edu/fpl-and-you/gi-bmp-program/>.

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Certified Professional (FFLCP)

FFL offers a Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Certified Professional (FFLCP) designation to individuals who have completed the required training in FFL principles and are familiar with the latest UF/IFAS recommendations. This professional certification recognizes those who have demonstrated their ability to use environmentally sustainable landscape-management practices to recognize and address common landscape issues. Up-to-date information regarding the FFLCP program is always available online at <https://fpl.ifas.ufl.edu/fpl-and-you/fpl-professional-certification/>.

Continuing Education

FFL offers a variety of online courses that provide CEUs for Landscape Architects, Community Association Managers, FNGLA Certified Professionals, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Certified Professionals and FDACS Limited Urban Fertilizer Applicator Certificate holders. Each one-hour course provides one CEU. Available courses include:

- Introduction to the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program
- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Legislation, Codes, and Your Community
- Maintenance with Florida-Friendly Landscaping™
- Florida-Friendly Turfgrass: Selection and Best Management Practices
- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Recognition Program
- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Design Considerations
- Irrigation BMPs for Professionals
- Lawn and Landscape BMPs for Professionals

Up-to-date information regarding FFL continuing education opportunities is always available online at <https://fpl.ifas.ufl.edu/training/online-courses/>.

Other Public Outreach Pathways of the FFL State Office

FLORIDA-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING™ IN A MINUTE RADIO SHOW

The FFL state office, with sponsorship from FDEP, produces the *Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ in a Minute* radio show, which airs twice each weekday on the UF public radio station WUFT-FM. Each one-minute spot airs once in the morning during *Morning Edition* and again in the afternoon during *All Things Considered*, with a new segment airing each weekday (i.e., five new segments a week, each aired twice per day).

All *FFL in a Minute* segments are archived on the FFL website at <https://fpl.ifas.ufl.edu/fplminute.htm>. The archive includes the recorded audio of the original broadcast, the text of the scripts, and links to relevant FFL topics.

FFL MOBILE APPS

FFL has developed a series of mobile apps that provide convenient access to a variety of topics:

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Plant Guide
<https://fpl.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/apps/plant-guide/>

Florida Fertilizer Ordinances
<https://fpl.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/apps/fertilizer-ordinances/>

Florida Toxic Plants
<https://fpl.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/apps/toxic-plants/>

FFL Butterfly Gardens
<https://fpl.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/apps/butterfly-gardens/>

FFL SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

The FFL state office regularly posts topics of interest to Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/uf.fpl/>) and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/floridafriendlylandscaping/>).

FFL Public Outreach through County-Based Extension Programs

County-based FFL programs, located within the respective county's UF/IFAS Extension office, are the primary public interface for FFL. FFL is active in 51 of Florida's 67 counties; those counties without active FFL Extension programs are those with low population densities and agriculturally dominated land uses. County-based FFL initiatives include numerous classes, workshops, and webinars run by UF Professors, faculty Extension agents and staff-level FFL

program coordinators. During 2019, county-based FFL programming conducted over 7,588 workshops, as well as other group-learning events, and reached over 165,096 Floridians with FFL information. County-based FFL agents and coordinators also routinely have social media and blog posts providing FFL information of local interest.

County Extension offices also provide most of the GI-BMP instructors, with additional instructors coming from the landscape industry. At any given time, there are approximately 250 active GI-BMP instructors statewide. While the FFL state office handles training and certifying GI-BMP instructors, in-person GI-BMP classes are generally coordinated through the county offices.

FFL Outreach through the Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) Program

Additional county-level FFL outreach is achieved through the separately administered UF/IFAS Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) Program. Nearly every one of Florida's 67 counties has an MGV program and, statewide, there are approximately 4,700 MGVs. MGs undergo extensive training on all aspects of Florida gardening, including comprehensive training on FFL. In turn, the MGs conduct myriad landscaping workshops year around throughout Florida that target the landscaping needs of Florida residential homeowners.

The MG program closely tracks all volunteer hours and interactions with the public. The state Master Gardener Coordinator estimates FFL-related activities (e.g., workshops, consultations, and public events) comprise an estimated 50% of the Master Gardener's volunteer efforts. Based on that estimate, during 2019 alone, the nearly 4,700 Master Gardener volunteers statewide spent some 163,193 hours promoting FFL concepts and reached 162,652 Floridians.

The FFL state office is also a major sponsor of the biennial Master Gardener Conference, a three-day event that routinely has an attendance of 400 to 500 Master Gardener Volunteers and other program stakeholders.

Landscape Recognitions

The FFL program recognizes home, commercial, and new construction landscapes that are designed and maintained using sustainable landscaping practices reflected in the nine FFL principles. County Extension offices take the lead in reviewing potential FFL landscapes and awarding the recognition to those that meet the evaluation criteria. Landscapes achieving FFL recognition receive a yard sign to display and a frameable certificate.

Measures of FFL Reach and Effectiveness

The FFL program's reach and effectiveness are primarily measured in three ways: data collected from county Extension program and GI-BMP trainers, online web traffic and virtual trainings, and the inclusion of FFL education programs in state and local government water restoration programs.

County Extension Reporting

County Extension agents submit an annual report called a Record of Accomplishment (ROA). These reports detail those programs, including FFL, that the agent is responsible for in performing their job duties. Agents may be involved in several programs, of which FFL may be a small or large fraction of their total workweek.

For each program, including FFL programming, agents track their public outreach contacts. Tracking categories include the number of classes/workshops that they conducted, as well as the attendance at each, the total number of educational materials developed (e.g., fact sheets, brochures), on-site home assessments, telephone consultation, email consultations, website hits, and social media contacts. FFL coordinators may also track Master Gardener volunteers who may be under their supervision, tracking the number of FFL-related activities and contacts that occur through their respective Master Gardener programs. During 2019, county-based FFL programs conducted 7,588 workshops with a total attendance of 165,096 persons.

A common workshop subject for FFL agents statewide is home irrigation water use and the steps that can be taken to conserve water through adjustments to home irrigation systems, which can be up to 50% of home water use. The subsequent water savings are reported each year and totaled by FFL staff. For 2019 these home irrigation water savings totaled 467 million gallons statewide, which is enough water to supply 5,308 households for an entire year: <https://pdec.ifas.ufl.edu/impacts/LandscapeWaterConservation.pdf>.

Past measures of program effectiveness included post-workshop "knowledge gain" surveys developed at the county level and administered to participants at the close of an FFL workshop. Since 2017, the FFL state office has annually conducted a consistent statewide "behavior change" survey that targets those persons who attended FFL workshops during the previous year. The survey questions address whether the participants had made

permanent changes to their landscaping practices because of the workshop and, if so, which practices they changed. The survey is an ongoing, permanent evaluation tool for the FFL program and, in coordination with FFL faculty advisors, will be continually refined to better capture the motivations behind the behavior changes affected by FFL workshop participants.

GI-BMP Certification Reporting

The GI-BMP program is a required training program for green industry professionals in Florida and is required to have a formal evaluation structure that provides numerous metrics to gauge success.

The county-based UF/IFAS Extension offices primarily provide the Extension agents who serve as GI-BMP instructors. These UF/IFAS GI-BMP instructors are augmented with additional instructors who are employed through the green industries; together forming a network of 250 active GI-BMP instructors distributed statewide and who, in 2019 alone, conducted 156 in-person GI-BMP training classes, in both English and Spanish, with a total attendance of 3,015. In addition to in-person attendance, 2,041 persons received GI-BMP training through the online and DVD formats. All GI-BMP course content is under continuous review and revision through the instructor network.

Nitrogen-Loading Reductions

The FDEP Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program seeks to reduce pollutant loading into Florida's waters, including the input of excess nutrients like nitrogen. To work toward this goal, the TMDL program routinely monitors Florida waters to identify those with impaired water quality and, for those waters that are found to be impaired, assesses their watersheds to determine the sources and amounts of the pollution. These watershed assessments then form the basis of Basin Area Management Plans (BMAPs) that describe specific projects and management actions to be undertaken in the watersheds to reduce pollutant loading to the impaired water body.

For these BMAPs, FDEP routinely recognizes FFL implementation within a watershed as a viable nutrient reduction project. For example, when calculating nitrogen load reductions for impaired waters, an active FFL program can account for up to 3% removal of the initial nitrogen load and is credited towards meeting the TMDL nitrogen reduction goal. Currently, there are approximately 20 BMAPs that quantify nitrogen removal credited to FFL program implementation. Accordingly, these BMAPs attribute the FFL efforts within their basins with 123,000 pounds of

nitrogen load reduction per year. This represents 123,000 pounds of nitrogen-based nonpoint source pollution that is kept out of Florida waters each year due to FFL program activities in these BMAP areas. Actual nitrogen removal across the state is higher because FFL operates statewide, regardless of BMAP locations, and its nonpoint source pollution prevention practices provide benefits wherever they are instituted.

Legislative Recognition and Directives

Section 373.185(1)(b), *Florida Statutes* (F.S.) formally defines Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ as

...quality landscapes that conserve water, protect the environment, are adaptable to local conditions, and are drought tolerant. The principles of such landscaping include planting the right plant in the right place, efficient watering, appropriate fertilization, mulching, attraction of wildlife, responsible management of yard pests, recycling yard waste, reduction of stormwater runoff, and water-front protection. Additional components include practices such as landscape planning and design, soil analysis, the appropriate use of solid waste compost, minimizing the use of irrigation, and proper maintenance.

Further, section 373.185(3)(a), F.S. 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...

Another Florida statute with direct applicability to the FFL program's organizational structure is section 403.9338, F.S., which requires landscape professionals to receive UF/IFAS training in FFL best management practices (under the FFL/GI-BMP training program) prior to applying to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) for a *limited certification for urban landscape commercial fertilizer application*, as required under section 482.1562, F.S. This training has been statutorily required since January 1, 2014.

Other Florida statutes that directly reference the section 373.185(1)(b), F.S. definition of FFL include:

- Section 125.568, F.S. (which pertains to county governments) and section 166.048, F.S. (which pertains to municipal governments), both of which state that FFL contributes to the conservation, protection, and

restoration of water and, therefore, county and municipal governments should include FFL in their planning for water conservation and water quality protection and restoration.

- Section 255.259, F.S. states:

...the Legislature finds that state government has the responsibility to promote Florida-friendly landscaping as a water conservation and water quality protection and restoration measure by using such landscaping on public property associated with publicly owned buildings or facilities.

- Similarly, section 335.167, F.S. requires FFL implementation on state highway rights-of-way.
- Section 373.187, F.S. requires the water management districts to use FFL on all their properties.
- Section 373.228, F.S. mandates that water management districts develop landscape irrigation and Florida-friendly landscaping design standards for new construction and that local governments use the standards and guidelines when developing landscape irrigation and Florida-friendly landscaping ordinances.
- Section 403.9337, F.S., which encourages county and municipal governments to adopt and enforce the Model Ordinance for Florida-Friendly Fertilizer Use on Urban Landscapes.
- Section 481.303(6)(a), F.S. defines professional services associated with the profession of *landscape architecture*.
- Section 720.3075, F.S. states that HOA documents may not prohibit homeowners from installing FFL.

Further, the legislature's finding in section 373.185(3)(a), F.S. that FFL serves a *compelling public interest* is reiterated in other statutes, including sections 125.568(3)(a), 166.048(3)(a), 255.259(4)(a), 335.167(2)(a), and 720.3075(4)(a), F.S.

The legislature also places FFL requirements on the state's five water management districts in that the Florida statutes (Chapter 373.185, F.S.) state that each water management district shall design and implement an incentive program to encourage all local governments within its district to adopt new ordinances or amend existing ordinances to require Florida-friendly landscaping. In addition, each water management district shall also work with the department, local governments, county Extension agents or offices, nursery and landscape industry groups, and other interested stakeholders to promote, through educational programs, publications, and other district activities, the use of Florida-friendly landscaping practices.

The FFL program has partnered with the St. Johns River, Southwest Florida, and South Florida WMDs to promote FFL through their Florida Water StarSM (FWS) program. FWS is a water conservation certification program for new and existing homes and commercial developments. This partnership includes the development of Florida-Friendly Water Star Gold Certification. This certification standard combines components of Florida Water StarSM Gold certification and Florida-Friendly LandscapingTM recognition programs to create an achievable, affordable, and measurable certification program with emphasis on both water quality and water quantity.

Another important FFL program associate is the Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA). FNGLA primarily provides support and guidance to the program by actively participating in the FFL Advisory Committee as a representative of the concerns and interest of the landscaping professional community. FNGLA also endorses FFLs educational classes and certifications for landscape professionals in concert with their own professional education courses. FNGLA also sponsors the FFL program at the annual FNGLA Landscape Show, which is a leading industry trade show for landscape professionals, educators, and nursery growers with over 7,000 people attending each year.

Summary

In summary, Florida-Friendly LandscapingTM (FFL) provides science-based landscape design and plant selection practices for installing and maintaining resilient, aesthetically pleasing landscapes. Once established, FFL landscapes require little, if any, irrigation, fertilizer, or pesticides. The Florida legislature has found that Florida-Friendly LandscapingTM serves a compelling public interest and, as such, formally recognizes FFL as quality, drought-tolerant landscapes that are adaptable to local conditions so that they conserve water and protect the environment. In addition, the Florida legislature has mandated that landscaping professionals who apply fertilizer must take the FFL Green Industries Best Management Practices (GI-BMP) training. Designed around its 9-Principles, which are in and of themselves flexible and adaptable as landscaping paradigms continue to evolve with Florida, Florida-Friendly LandscapingTM provides the resilient, sustainable landscape practices that Florida needs as its population continues to expand in the coming decades.