



Florida-Friendly Fridays: An Integrated Teaching Approach to the Nine Principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™

TERRA FREEMAN*

University of Florida/IFAS, St. Johns County Extension, St. Augustine, FL 32092

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Water conservation, supply, and quality are issues of critical concern throughout Florida and especially in St. Johns County. One of the fastest growing areas in the country, St. Johns County experienced an estimated 75% growth in population from 2000–17, and another 27% increase is expected by 2025, to a tune of 295,768 residents. The horticultural practices employed by residents of this expanding coastal community have a significant impact on the quality of the waterways, which directly affects water supply and quality of drinking water. As the population and development of this community continues to expand, it is imperative to educate residents about environmentally sustainable lawn and landscape practices. The Florida-Friendly Friday series utilizes an integrated teaching approach to provide an in-depth exploration of the nine principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™. The objective is for participants to conserve water by adopting Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ methods in the management of their residential landscapes.

Materials and Methods

The integrated educational approach accommodates various learning styles by including experiential, reinforcement and integrative methods of program delivery. Workshops included lectures guided by instructional multi-media presentations, fact sheets, hands-on activities to practice information taught and tours to reinforce subject matter content. For example, the lecture on how to recycle yard waste was followed by a guided tour of our county agricultural center community garden where various methods of composting are practiced. A Master Gardener was present to discuss her personal experience with using compost in her garden plot. The lecture on irrigating efficiently was followed by a demonstration of how to measure water distribution from automatic irrigation systems using catch cans, as well as the various irrigation spray heads available.

Results and Discussion

The extension agent provided nine programs to 158 people throughout this workshop series in 2017. A three to nine month follow-up survey revealed behavior changes, gallons of water saved and financial savings for workshop participants. The survey, which was distributed to 55 program participants, concluded that 86% (n = 14) have already made changes to their landscape or the way they manage their landscape. All respondents (100%) shared information learned in the program with other people. The survey revealed the following information for the corresponding Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principle:

- **Fertilize Appropriately**—80% (n = 5) now use fertilizers that contain 2% or less phosphorus (unless more was indicated by a soil test) and 60% determined the amount of fertilizer needed based on the size of the area to be fertilized.
- **Manage Yard Pests Responsibly**—100% (n = 4) now scout for beneficial insects when managing pests, identify pests before applying pesticides and use Florida-Friendly materials like horticultural soaps, oils, and *Bacillus thuringiensis* when using pesticides. 80% (n = 5) spray only affected plants and small buffer area when using pesticides.
- **Irrigate Efficiently**—77% (n = 10) reduced the amount of water used to irrigate their landscape. The most common irrigation practice changes (among those who use in-ground irrigation or sprinklers and were not already using the practice) reported were: manually turning off the irrigation system, reducing irrigation from 3 or more days per week to 2 days per week, reducing irrigation frequency during the winter, reducing irrigation frequency during the summer, and calibrating their sprinkler systems to deliver 1/2 inch” or 3/4 inch instead of ≥ 1 inch or more per application (69%, n = 6 to 10). 64% (n = 9) converted approximately 6000 sq. ft. to low volume irrigation and 21% eliminated irrigation in some areas altogether. 323,160 gallons of water are estimated to have been saved by adopting these Florida-Friendly Landscaping activities among 12 survey respondents. At \$2.97 per kilogallon in St. Johns County, this amounts to a savings of \$959.79.

*Corresponding author. Email: terraf@ufl.edu

- **Right Plant, Right Place**—75% (n = 11) replaced high maintenance plants with low maintenance plants; matched plants to the site to conserve water, fertilizer, and pesticides; and selected disease and pest resistant varieties when available.
- **Mulch, Recycle Yard Waste and Attract Wildlife to your Landscape**—75% (n = 12) added a compost pile or bin to create organic matter; added a 2–3 inch layer of organic mulch to plant beds; added plants, water sources, and/or shelter to attract wildlife; blow lawn clippings back

onto lawn after each mowing; and leave grass clippings on their lawn.

Conclusion

The Florida-Friendly Friday workshop series was successful in achieving behavior changes among program participants and conserving water in St. Johns County. Due to the demand for water conservation education in St. Johns County, the Florida-Friendly-Friday series will continue to evolve and respond to the county's growing needs.