



Florida-Friendly: Reintroduction to Indian River County

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Many homeowners in Indian River County are not sure what the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) program is. They do not understand how these best management practices can benefit them. Master Gardener volunteers expressed concern about the reactions of people in the community when engaged in discussion about the FFL program. Many residents would react negatively to landscape management suggestions prefaced with “Florida-Friendly” because of misconceptions about the overall basis of the program.

Indian River County is one of several counties along the Indian River Lagoon. It has experienced a significant increase in population, requiring more residential housing development. It is important that the relationship between water quality/quantity issues and residential horticultural practices be clarified. The Environmental Horticulture Agent set out to increase knowledge and engagement of homeowners with the FFL Program. The objectives of this research were to: a) target homeowners with accurate FFL information to increase understanding and encourage behavior change and b) collect data to assist with improving programmatic methodology and outreach focus.

Methods

The Agent collaborated with the Pelican Island Audubon Society to use their classroom to provide a Florida-Friendly Landscaping Seminar Series. Over 10 Wednesday afternoons, nine PowerPoint presentations were shared with attendees during “Lunch and Learn” sessions. Data was gathered through quizzes. Participants were given EDIS (University of Florida/IFAS Extension) publications and Florida-Friendly information handouts pertaining to the lesson taught that afternoon. They were also given information on how to contact Indian River County Master Gardeners for more information on any of the topics shared.

Results

Seventy-three people in Indian River County have been reintroduced to the Florida-Friendly Landscaping program. 71 of those people have reported knowledge gain (Fig. 1) and a willingness to manage their landscape more efficiently with residential landscaping best management practices. Behavior changes within 6 months include:

- Better plant selections—including increasing native plant populations and more low-maintenance varieties.
- Soil testing before fertilizing.
- Installing rain barrels.

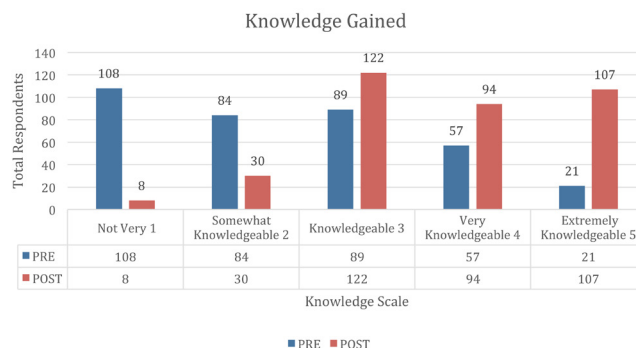


Fig. 1. Knowledge gained based on pre- and post-test scores.

- Maintaining planting beds with at least 3 inches of mulch.
- Scouting landscape for pests.
- Installing a rain garden using the right plants.
- Expanding planting beds and adding more pollinator attractors.
- Creating a 10-foot low-maintenance buffer zone.

Behavior changes within 12 months include:

- Enlarging planting beds.
- Checking irrigation heads.
- Composting yard waste.
- Groundcovers to slow down and absorb stormwater.
- Using Integrated Pest Management.
- Install a rain garden.
- Expand native planting spaces.

Several participants contacted the agent/Master Gardeners for assistance with various inquiries relating to their residential landscape. They were also inclined to share our contact information with others.

Conclusions

Most of the reported knowledge gained related to “Right Plant, Right Place” and “Fertilize Appropriately.” Several classes planned for Fall 2018 will address plant selection choices. We are also planning a demonstration and workshop day to teach appropriate Fertilizer Management.

Better advertising for the programming needs to be done. Facebook engagement will be increased and various local community outlets will be solicited for more promotion of the programming. We are currently working with the county library system to provide more venues for our talks and to create demonstrations of FFL in various areas within the library landscape.

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