



## Creating a Teaching Garden with Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Principles

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The Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden, located in the courtyard of the Hillsborough County and UF-IFAS Extension Service, was created to provide dynamic, small gardens demonstrating environmentally friendly design and management techniques of the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program. This program was created to help preserve, protect, and conserve the state's natural water resources and teaches nine landscaping principles that educate Floridians on how to design, install, and maintain an attractive, healthy, and environmentally-friendly landscape while saving time, energy, and money. These principles include: right plant–right place, water efficiently, fertilize appropriately, maximize mulch, attract wildlife, control yard pests responsibly, recycle, reduce stormwater runoff, and protect the waterfront.

Before



Fig. 1. Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden, before.

After



Fig. 2. Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden, after.

### Materials and Methods

Bette S. Walker, the first Executive Director of the Tampa Bay Wholesale Growers (TBWG), was provided seed money and a promise of plant material for establishing a garden in her name. She envisioned a teaching garden that would showcase the horticulture industry and educate the public. The Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden is an educational outreach of the Hillsborough County Extension Service. A conceptual plan was created and donated to Extension by a local landscape architect incorporating six themed garden rooms, which include:

1) Florida-Friendly Style, an easy-to-create landscape using the nine principles and recycled products, such as composite decking and rubber mulch.

We would like to thank Dr. Sydney Park Brown for her leadership, dedication and foresight in the creation of this teaching and demonstration garden. Dr. Brown was instrumental in originating docent materials, a garden brochure and presentation. The purpose of this work is to share the garden creation sequence as it occurred during the formation of the Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden (Figs. 1 and 2) based on the nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles which help preserve, protect, and conserve the state's natural water resources.

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2) Asian Influence Garden, a simple, meditative garden filled with shade-loving plants and textural interests of granite stepping stones and a bench, hand-carved brick pagoda by a local brick artist and bamboo screening.

3) Wildlife Habitat Area, providing the three basic needs for attracting wildlife: food, shelter/cover and water. This garden features a bat house, nesting boxes, bird feeder, bird bath, a stone path and bog garden watered from rainwater harvested via cistern, decreasing stormwater runoff (Fig. 3).

4) Backyard Bar-B-Que Patio, a tropical setting that family and friends can enjoy. This area includes a gas grill, flagstone table and walkway, screened wash-up area and storage shed which contains a display of environmentally-friendly fertilizers and pesticides and microirrigation connection demonstration signage.

5) Sensory Garden, is our touch, taste, smell, and see area which contains herbs, flowers and fruits. Children and differently enabled gardeners can easily access the garden and sit on the raised block planters.

6) Water Gardens, several are featured including a waterfall, pond with koi, a still pond containing native killifish that simulates a lake or retention pond and "aquascaped" with attractive native aquatic plants which protect the waterfront, bog garden with carnivorous plants and three bubbling pots.



Fig. 3. Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden, Wildlife Habitat Area.

Based on the conceptual plan, an overall plan was prepared by staff and a Master Gardener engineer to outline the order of construction phases. The order after location selection and conceptual plan was as follows: grant writing, reporting and funding, determination of general contractor and sub-contractors with bids requested and awarded, oversight of the work performed and volunteer recruitment. Many significant construction activities occurred in sequential order, such as site demolition, drainage, hardscape construction, irrigation, electrical wiring, plant materials and mulch. Products were selected based on utilization of pervious surfaces that decrease stormwater runoff, recycled products, microirrigation (Fig. 4), organic mulch and plant materials that were drought-tolerant and site selected (right plant, right place). Master Gardener volunteers were the major labor force. Docent and self-led tours were a frequent occurrence as were speaker system taped environmental messages.

### Results and Discussion

The most significant lesson to be learned by garden visitors (n= 6,500+ to date) was the benefit of choosing Florida-Friendly, drought-tolerant plants that require minimal water, fertilizer, and pesticides to help reduce the overall effects of non-point source pollution and stormwater runoff. Visitors valued the plant signage, organic mulch displays, landscape design and maintenance ideas and have made Florida-Friendly changes in their home landscapes. Creating a construction plan while utilizing Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles has positively affected Tampa Bay by providing homeowners with examples they can experience in person and implement in their own yards after visiting the demonstration and teaching garden and attending educational programs, which include composting (Fig. 5), vermi-composting, microirrigation, and rainwater harvesting.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

### Literature Cited

#### Extension Circulars

- Brown, Sydney Park and Lynn Barber. 2004. Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden brochure. Univ. of Florida IFAS Ext.
- University of Florida IFAS Extension and Florida Department of Environmental Protection. 2009. The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Handbook. A Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Publ., Univ. of Florida.