Protecting Florida’s Waterfront and shorelines are a vital key in preserving and promoting habitats for our native fauna and flora. Residential and Commercial property owners that reside next to a waterfront must become aware of the challenges and rewards of protecting these valuable and sensitive natural resources the Sunshine State has to offer. Understanding the many different types of water bodies, the effects of runoff and pollutants and methods in which to create a “living” shoreline are several ways to safeguard our waterfront.

Florida has a large abundance and variety of water bodies. Throughout our state, there are natural lakes, ponds and rivers just about everywhere. These natural lakes, ponds and rivers are host to a variety of wildlife. Herons, bald eagles, alligators and other types of wildlife, big and small, are attracted to and some make their home next to the shorelines. Native flora such as Buttonbush, water lilies and Cypress trees are also found along the waterfront. Shorelines next to our saltwater lagoons and bays provide an ideal habitat for our wildlife and flora that reside next to these extremely sensitive areas. Due to the increasing population and development, storm water retention ponds are appearing in great numbers. These areas have the potential to be very environmentally friendly, if landscaped correctly.

Unfortunately, the increasing development around the state is slowly damaging Florida’s fragile waterfront. Retention ponds that are being created have no shoreline buffer. Homes being built alongside natural lakes, ponds, rivers and saltwater lagoons are decreasing the shoreline habitat to make a more manicured look. This results in grass clippings, fertilizers, pesticides and other harmful pollutants that reduce water quality that can be harmful to organisms, including humans, in an around the waterfront. Newly established landscapes around waterfronts also have the potential to introduce non-native exotic plants. Water hyacinth, hydrilla, skunk vine and air potato are examples of invasive plants that can choke out native vegetation, affecting both plants and animals.

Planting shoreline plants and aquatic plants in the buffer zone will also attract a host of birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects and mammals. Plants such as cord grass, blue flag Iris, juncus, pickerel weed and water lily are just a few plants available to create a Florida Friendly waterfront.
Sumter County Starts a Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society

By Holly Tuxbury

It was a plan on the back burner for a long time to add Sumter County to the list of chapters of the Florida Native plant Society (FNPS). In July the process began to bring a chapter to our county to educate its residents and encourage them to learn all that they can about Florida’s many native plants and how to use them properly in their landscaping. Due to the speedy process of countless emails, phone calls, and faxes, the Sumter County Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society became a reality in September 2006.

A handful of Sumter County Master Gardeners and their neighbors attended the first meeting at the Lake Sumter Community College in Sumterville. Membership forms were passed about the room and sent to Melbourne to add members to our up and coming chapter. The FNPS Board of Directors approved the chapter in September after all of our documentation was reviewed. In October, Allen Wise gave a presentation to the growing Chapter on various native plants to include their habitats, their benefits to their habitats, and how to use them in landscaping. Later that week, Nancy Dwyer of Florida Wildlife Commission, led some members on a guided walk of Halfmoon Wildlife Management Area.

Our Chapter meets the second Monday of each month at 6 pm. In November, Joan Bradshaw, from UF/IFAS will be speaking to the group about Shoreline Critters. The Chapter will have a table at Agritunity at the Sumter Expo Hall on December 2nd. Beginning in December the Chapter will be meeting at the Sumterville Recreation Center. We have various field trips planned and are excited to watch membership grow at each meeting. We welcome anyone who would like to join our chapter. Our goal is not to separate ourselves from the Master Gardener program, but to bring both groups of diverse people together to better educate the residents of our county. We hope to work with the Master Gardeners in the future on various projects and welcome everyone to our meetings.

Thank you for reading The Sumter Gardener which was honored by UF/IFAS at the recent Master Gardener Conference.
Leaves do more than clutter your yard and your gutter. They are important to maintaining life as we know it. Leaves engage in photosynthesis, a process essential to the life cycle. This function involves light and water, so taking note of a leaf’s condition and its shape is important to the gardener. With just a little knowledge about leaves, some plant care questions can be answered.

A leaf’s appearance can give clues as to problems with the plant. For example, dry weather can cause serious problems with the leaf’s transpiration, or moisture loss. Leaves appear scorched and / or fall off. These same symptoms appear when the ground is frozen, so the plant cannot get the moisture it needs.

Not all foliage leaves carry out their functions the same way. Fine hairs on leaves slow down moisture loss and help shade the blade’s surface from the sun. Some leaves are specialized to protect buds, attach to supports, or even catch insects.

Leaf arrangements and color affect the way a plant uses moisture. Leaves that point at right angles to the stem absorb more heat than plants whose blades are arranged vertically towards the sun, such as yucca. Light colored plants absorb less heat than do dark plants.

Many leaves have a waxy layer on the surface. This is called the cuticle. It protects the leaf from drying out and even provides some protection from insects. Plants that grow best in the shade usually have large, flat leaves that have a thin outer layer of cells. This allows for maximum light area because there is so little resistance to light. Energy is conserved and directed to the foliage in order to carry out the photosynthesis process. That is why so many shade plants have fewer seeds and flowers and are usually valued for their foliage.
Protecting Florida’s Waterfront:

All is not gloom and doom, however. There are techniques that both residential and commercial waterfront property owners can do to protect and enhance our waterfronts. First, establish at least a 10 foot buffer zone that separates the water body and the landscape or lawn. This area should be maintenance free, using no fertilizers, no pesticides and no mowing. This buffer zone is where the shoreline plants will grow, also called the littoral zone. This zone will decrease runoff, prevent erosion and filter nutrients and sediments associated with runoff.

Understanding and utilizing these methods on how to protect and create a Florida Friendly Waterfront, is the first step to an environmentally rich shoreline habitat. If residential and commercial waterfront property owners create shorelines in their own landscape, it will be both beneficial to humans and Florida’s native flora and fauna for generations to come. References: An Introduction to Aquascaping. EDIS document WEC-4. A Guide to Environmentally Friendly Landscaping-FYN Handbook. EDIS document SP191-A

Nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping Principles

1. Right Plant, Right Place
   - soil, sunlight, water exposure and conditions
   - limit plants that need a lot of water or care, reduce as much grass as you can, bedded plants use less water, remove invasive exotics

2. Water Efficiently
   - use a rain gauge, water only when plant is stressed, install drip irrigation
   - Collect rain in a rain barrel, turn off sprinklers when it rains

3. Fertilize Appropriately
   - fertilize only to maintain health, slow release is better for the environment, don’t over irrigate after fertilizing
Become a Scientist at Your Own Home

Those of you who have either grown up in Florida or have lived in Florida for a while have learned to accept the different changes in the weather. In fact our weather is a major component to tourism as Florida is known as the “Sunshine State.” Our weather not only effects many facets of our state, such as urban agriculture, a homeowners yard and plants, small nursery owners, and everyone in between. Since our aquifer depends on rain to replace the water that has been used, a drought draws concern to most people.

According to http://weather.com Center Hill, FL only received 0.84 inches of rain for the month of October. This year’s hurricane season has been affected by warmer temperatures in the Pacific which is known as el Nino, which tends to decrease the number of hurricanes. This is great news to many residents that have been hit by forceful hurricanes over the past few years. As you have noticed we have been in a long drought period with the occasional quick pin-point storms that pop up on our radar, but the storms do not produce the rain that we all need.

People who depend on the rain listen closely as forecasters predict this winter as an El Nino year. What is El Nino? An el Nino year tends to bring 30 to 40% more rainfall than a neutral or la Nina year. Although we have been lucky this hurricane season we have also been staring in the eyes of a drought. When the rainy season hits with days of rain we notice localized flooding in many areas. The rain falls in such large quantities and in such a short time that the rain cannot percolate through the soil like we need it to which causes other problems. Agriculture seems to have good crop years during el Nino. However, el Nino tends to bring cooler weather with it.

Since Florida is a large peninsula weather can change quickly as most areas of Florida are no further than 80 miles from either the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean. Many of our weather patterns occur due to colliding fronts from the east and west. These typically create storms that roam over Central Florida. How can you combat the weather? Create rain barrels and place them near down spouts around your home. Monitor the weather by watching local forecasts as well as national forecasts. Place rain gauges in various parts of your yard. Keep daily records of the weather in your area. You can even purchase a home weather tracker and keep it simple or go further and monitor the barometric pressure, humidity, current temperature, ‘feels like’ temperature, etc.

A forecast is really only accurate for a few days. Continue to monitor future forecasts and educate yourselves more about El Nino, La Nina, and Nuetral weather systems. If you use many of the principles of Florida Yards and Neighborhoods, such as ‘right plant right place’ a wind break of trees can keep you warmer in the winter or cooler in the summer.

Sources: Climate Forecast and Decision Making in Agriculture (ABE 352)
The Florida Climactic Center and Weather.com
University of Florida Publications

All University of Florida publications listed in this newsletter are available on the Internet at the web site:

Master Gardener Plant Clinic

Currently, we offer plant clinics every Thursday at the New Sumter County Extension Office, in Bushnell from 10:00 a.m. to 3 p.m. Also, we offer one plant clinic a month in The Villages at the Sumter County Annex at 8033 C R 466. The Villages’ plant clinic is usually held

Master Gardener Meetings

The Sumter County Master Gardener’s monthly meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of each month at 9:00 a.m. at the County Extension Office in Bushnell, FL. Everyone is

Soil pH Tests

Master Gardeners will test your soil for pH for a $2 fee. For a fee of $7, a detailed soil analysis can be sent to the University of Florida. Call the Extension office (352) 793-2728 to get directions for submitting soil samples.

Edited by Susan Kelly and Brook Burn.

Produced by Nancy King and Holly Tuxbury and various articles were submitted by other Master Gardeners.

This issue was approved on November , 2006 by Brook Burn Extension Agent—Urban Horticultu-
Nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping Principles

4. Mulch
   - cut down on mowing by mulching areas difficult to mow or shaded
   - keep 2-3 inches of mulch
   - keep mulch 2 inches away from the base of the plant
   - fallen leaves make great mulch
   - Look for cypress mulch that was not harvested from Florida’s wetlands, check out mulch alternatives

5. Attract Wildlife
   - Vines, shrubs, and trees provide great cover for wildlife for nesting and as a food source
   - Provide a water source, change water daily for a bird bath, ensure that it stays healthy, or put in a pond
   - Add to your yard a bat house, bird houses, and or a brush pile
   - Use pesticides wisely if needed

6. Manage Yard Pest Responsibly
   - know you good bugs and bad bugs, be patient, low levels of pests means minimal damage
   - check plants regularly for pests, i.e. scales, mealy bugs
   - try horticultural oils or insecticidal soaps
   - READ LABELS

7. Recycle
   - Compost, compost, compost

8. Reduce Storm water Runoff
   - direct down spouts to flower beds / lawn
What Can I do with my Yard Right Now?

I have a sandy bank and I don’t know what to do? Florida’s sandy soils erode very quickly and easily. If you want to add a ground cover, you should not disrupt the sand bank by loosening the soil. Minimal soil preparation is preferred so your bank won’t wash away in the next rain.

- Pick a durable ground cover
- Prepare the area by mowing where necessary
- Lay down landscaping fabric to prevent erosion
- Plant ground cover in small holes in the fabric, space properly
- Try hay or pine mulch and hand water to keep the new plants moist

When planting a plant make sure that the hole you dig is large enough to allow for growth. Once your plant is in the ground use extra soil to mold a berm of soil 4 to 6 inches high completely around the plant. This will help ensure the water goes to the new plant. Add 2 to 3 inches of mulch, remember not to let the mulch touch the plant. Now watch it grow!

You may also want to plant vines or other ground covers that will tolerate a mild winter. Choose plants such as Alamanda, bougainvilia for vines or climbers. Ground covers that may work well are beach sunflower or Mexican heather. Plant them in areas that you can enjoy watching them grow and bloom. To help out wildlife leave any plants that are browning as many birds will use these plants for cover or take pieces of the plants for nesting materials. There may also be some seeds that have dried and will produce a food source for wildlife. Just because it is becoming cooler doesn’t mean that insect and other pest problems will vanish with the warm breeze. Continue to inspect your plants for pests such as scales, mites, and mealy bugs for instance.

More month by month gardening tips can be found in:

*Gardening in Florida, Month by Month What To Do Each Month to have a Beautiful Garden all Year* written by Tom MacCubbin.
Growing Veggies

“In Our Children's Garden”

By Donna Lester

We plant our seeds
And plucked some weeds
In our garden beds

We use our hands
And some tools we have
To farm this piece of land

Then we wait and we watch
For the seeds to grow
To all of our delight

And then we’ll harvest
When it’s time
And eat up every bite

For farming is a lot of fun
And it’s a lot of hard work, too!
But—farming brings us happiness
That’s why we’re loving what we do.

Life’s Emotions—Poetry of the Heart