

RIGHT PLANT, RIGHT PLACE



**LANDSCAPING PRINCIPLES FOR
FLORIDA-FRIENDLY YARDS**

<http://www.floridagardening.org/>



RIGHT PLANT, RIGHT PLACE

Have you ever bought a plant that looked great at the nursery or garden center, only to have it die once you planted it? One way to avoid this heartbreaking scenario is by putting the right plant in the right place — matching the plant to the site conditions. This encompasses far more than simply putting sun-worshipping plants in your yard's sunny spots. You also need to consider things like maintenance and water needs. Our checklist will help you review some basic guidelines for getting the right plant in the right place in your Florida-Friendly Yard.

- n **Wet vs. dry.** Many **drought-tolerant** plants thrive on elevated dry spots or in windy areas, but they can quickly succumb to root diseases and pest problems if you plant them in low-lying areas where water tends to pool after heavy rains. Drought-favoring plants also do well in exposed areas, on berms and along the unshaded southern or western walls of buildings.

Position plants adapted to wet soils in low spots, waterways and areas with poor drainage. The bottom line when placing plants in your landscape is not to waste time, energy and money caring for a plant that is not adapted to the spot you have set aside for it.

- n **Wind-wise plantings.** In Florida, winter's prevailing winds hail from the north or northwest. A solid fence or a row of **evergreens** situated on the north side of a house forms a barrier against cold winter winds and reduces evaporative water loss. Winds from the south, southeast and southwest predominate during summer months, when welcome air circulation cools outdoor living spaces and reduces moisture buildup on foliage.
- n **Made in the shade.** Position trees and shrubs strategically to improve your home's heating and cooling capacity. Tree shade, for instance, can reduce air conditioning costs by an estimated 50 percent. Plant **deciduous** shade trees on the south, east and west sides of a house to cast shade in summer and let warming light enter windows in winter.

FYN Glossary Box



Drought tolerant: describes plants that require less water because they are adapted to regions with frequent drought or to soils with low water-holding capacity



UF Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants:



An air-conditioning system's outdoor compressor/condenser unit uses less energy when it is shaded from direct sun during the day — but be careful not to block the unit's airflow. If the warm discharge air cannot escape, the intake air temperature rises, causing the unit to operate less efficiently.

- n **Plant matchmaking.** A common landscape “plan” scatters woody plants across an expanse of lawn, with no clear design pattern. While this may look the “norm,” the truth is that turf and woody ornamentals have different water, fertilizer and maintenance needs. All it takes is one misplaced shrub to disrupt mowing and irrigation patterns. Reduce maintenance and conserve water in the landscape by grouping plants in beds according to water requirements and maintenance needs.
- n **The lowdown on grass.** For sunny recreational areas, turfgrass makes an excellent choice — but most types do not grow well in dense shade. In shady spots, if you want to cultivate a green carpet underfoot, plant groundcovers.



Photo by: UF/IFAS

Live oak (Quercus virginiana) provides shade on the western side of this home.

FYN Glossary Box



Evergreen: a plant that retains at least some of its leaves year-round

Deciduous: a plant that sheds all of its leaves at one time each year



Plant Selection

Choosing plants is the fun part of landscaping! Florida's climate supports countless varieties of plants — many of which are grown by local nurseries. The plants you choose determine how much maintenance your Florida-Friendly Yard will require and also how long your landscape will last. For example, fast-growing trees often have a shorter life span than slow-growing trees.

How can you be sure you are making the best plant choices? Begin the process by completing a site analysis of your yard (see pages 8–14). With that information in hand, use these steps as a guide to selecting the right plants for the right places in your Florida-Friendly Yard.



Photo by: UF/IFAS

Bromeliads are remarkably drought tolerant. Use them in mass plantings beneath palm trees or along patios, paths or walkways.

- n **Focus first on low maintenance plants** suitable to your site. Once these plants are established in the right location, most require little, if any, supplemental water, fertilizers or pesticides.
- n **Don't want to water?** Select drought-tolerant plants suited to your soil. Once they are established, your watering chores will be done.
- n **Welcome wildlife.** Provide flowering and fruiting plants to bring birds and butterflies into your yard. Florida is a stopover for many migrating and wintering butterflies and birds — design a landscape that caters to these colorful, winged creatures.
- n **Plant for impact.** Limit the number of plants with high water and maintenance requirements, placing them where they will have the greatest visual impact.
- n **Avoid invasives.** Do not plant noxious, invasive species. The State of Florida prohibits planting of Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), Australian



pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), melaleuca (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), carrotwood (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*), Chinese tallow (*Sapium sebiferum*) and many others. If these plants are present in your yard, remove them. They crowd out native plants and seriously threaten Florida's ecosystems and wildlife.

Several other common landscape plants can become invasive in parts of Florida and should be avoided. The UF/IFAS Invasive Plants Working Group evaluates the invasive properties of plants and provides recommendations on their use. For a copy of the most recent recommendations from the IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas, see your county's UF/IFAS Extension office or visit

<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment.html>. For more information on invasive plants, see the website of the Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants at **<http://aquat1.ifas.ufl.edu>**.

- n **Aim for diversity.** Create a mosaic of trees, shrubs, groundcovers, native grasses and wildflowers. Monocultures — large expanses of the same plant species — are prone to disease and insect infestation and aren't as sustainable as a diverse plant community.
- n **Keep grass useful.** Plan turf areas to be functional and design them for easy maintenance. Define planting bed edges and shapes to accommodate your mower without tricky maneuvering.
- n **Cope with a slope.** Use groundcovers on slopes where grass may not thrive but the potential for runoff exists. Count on groundcovers to fill in shady areas where turf won't survive.
- n **Beg off quick fixes.** Do not be fooled by the quick-fix appeal of fast-growing plants. Such plants require frequent pruning, which creates more clippings and yard waste. Also, fast growth yields lots of lush, green shoots — which can attract certain pests. Slow-growing plants may take longer to fill in your landscape, but they'll ultimately last longer and create less work.
- n **Upkeep tips.** Do not overlook maintenance needs when designing your landscape. It's hard to mow grass on sloped or in extremely wet areas, so avoid planting turf where you can't easily cut it. Place hedges where you can access them easily from all sides — or trimming chores will quickly become nightmares.

<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment.html>



Florida Yard Tip:



Know Your Zone!

The USDA and American Horticultural Society (AHS) describe plants in terms of the lowest and highest temperatures where they can be grown.

To use this information, you need to know:

- n Your zones for heat tolerance and cold hardiness. Discover that information at these links:

For cold: <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/hzm-se1.html>

For heat: http://www.ahs.org/publications/heat_zone_finder.htm

- n The zones for plants you want to grow. Unearth that information on plant tags, in reference books or on the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> or the FYN website at <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Match the plants you want to grow with your growing zones and you will improve your odds of gardening success.



Floridata:



Florida Yard Tip:



Plant Selection Savvy

As you choose plants for your Florida-Friendly Yard, remember that plants do more than just look good. Many types pull double duty in the landscape, adding beauty and also fulfilling some other function — like providing privacy, attracting butterflies or bearing tasty fruit. Consider these plant characteristics as you design your landscape:

Plant traits that reduce maintenance and prevent runoff pollution

- n Drought resistance
- n Pest resistance
- n Non-invasiveness
- n Slow growth
- n Wind resistance
- n Low nutritional requirements

Plant traits that attract wildlife

- n Cover and habitat
- n Seeds and nuts
- n Fleshy fruits and berries
- n Nectar and larval food for butterflies
- n Red tubular flowers for hummingbirds

Plant traits that affect humans

- n Shade
- n Scent
- n Allergies
- n Thorns
- n Screen for privacy
- n Attractive flowers or foliage
- n Edible fruits, flowers, leaves or roots
- n Deciduous or evergreen



Florida Yard Tip:



Plant Know-How

Throughout Florida, experts who can assist you in your plant choices abound. Try these services, most of which are free, for advice on putting the right plant in the right place:

- n UF/IFAS Extension Service
- n Florida Master Gardeners
- n Florida Certified Horticultural Professionals
- n Florida Native Plant Society
- n Florida Division of Forestry
- n Water Management Districts
- n USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- n Libraries

For More Information on Natives

While it may be rare to encounter a native Floridian, plants native to Florida prove easy to find in some areas. Some Florida **native plants** are widely available at local garden centers, and others are becoming more available as demand for them grows. Want to learn more about native plants suitable for your yard? Try these tips to get started:

- n Visit parks, wildlife preserves, botanical gardens, FYN demonstration landscapes and nurseries to view native plants. Some plant nurseries specialize in Florida native plants.

FYN Glossary Box



Native plants: plants that were present at the time of first European contact in Florida (about 1500 A.D.); a plant that occurs naturally in a particular region, state, ecosystem and habitat without direct or indirect human actions



Florida Native Plant Society:



- n Visit the library or bookstores (particularly those at botanical gardens) to find good reference books on Florida native plants.
- n Search the web for information on native plants. For some sources, see the references at <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu> under the link for the FYN Handbook.
- n Consider hiring a landscape architect/contractor or designer who is knowledgeable about native plants. For a consulting fee, you can ask a native plant expert simply to survey your yard and make suggestions — and you can still do the planting yourself.
- n Consult the plant list in the back of this book (native plants are identified).

Remember: Just because a plant is native does not guarantee its success in your landscape. Always put the right plant in the right place.

Florida Yard Tip:



Trees Can Help

Not sure where to start? Plant trees. Establishing a tree canopy is a great way to begin your Florida-Friendly Yard. Trees not only provide shade and wildlife habitat, but they also help to reduce stormwater runoff. Trees significantly increase the value of a home and lot.

According to the American Forestry Association, trees have other significant monetary benefits. Each year, a single tree provides \$73 worth of air conditioning savings, \$75 worth of erosion control, \$75 worth of wildlife shelter and \$50 worth of air pollution reduction. Compounding this total of \$273 annually for 50 years at 5% interest results in a tree value of \$57,151. The overall benefits far outweigh the initial cost of each tree.



Photo by: UF/IFAS

Members of a 4-H club planting a tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) on Arbor Day.



Florida Yard Tip:



Soaker Hoses

After you invest your hard-earned cash in plants, count on an inexpensive solution to help establish them in the landscape — soaker hoses. These hoses seep or leak water along their length, delivering it to the soil around plantings. Lay the hose on top of the soil, or

bury it slightly in soil or mulch.

Landscape staple pins work great to hold the hose in place. Use the soaker hose until the plant is established and showing new growth, then store the hose for future use.

