1. **Decide why you want to landscape.** Most homeowners think of landscaping as a way to add beauty to their home or to improve the resale value. Other reasons to landscape might prove more problem-oriented, such as trying to reduce noise, create a microclimate or lure wildlife to a yard. The FYN program adds one more idea to the palette of reasons to landscape: to protect the environment. Appropriate landscaping stabilizes soil, prevents erosion, filters pollutants and reduces harmful **runoff** — all of which contribute to preserving Florida’s unique natural resources.

2. **Set goals for use and maintenance.** Determine how you will use your property. Do you need a play area for your children, or perhaps you would like to focus on entertaining family and friends outdoors? Your passion may be raising vegetables or simply savoring a waterfront view. Decide how much time you want to spend in your yard. You may want to create a low-maintenance yard to save time and money.

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**FYN Glossary Box**

**Runoff:** the portion of rain or irrigation water on an area that is discharged through stream channels; the water that is lost without entering the soil is called surface runoff.

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**FDEP Stormwater Management:**

http://www.dep.state.fl.us/secretary/watman/
PROTECT THE WATERFRONT

Waterfront property owners have firsthand knowledge of the special contribution lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and lagoons make to Florida’s quality of life. Florida-Friendly Yards located on a waterfront must address certain challenges and responsibilities. As next-door neighbor to these natural resource treasures, you must make it your mission to practice good environmental stewardship.

To design and maintain a landscape that borders a waterfront of any sort requires a strong focus on the natural environment, as well as on environmental impact. If you presently live on the waterfront or are considering moving to a waterfront location, review these points to make the most of your landscape — to create a yard that is beautifully functional for you and environmentally safe for the natural resources of our state.

Saltwater Considerations

Naturally sloping shorelines, particularly when buffered by a fringe of mangroves or marsh grass, help smooth out waves and reduce cloudiness in the water. In addition, mangroves and other shoreline plants contribute to the food web, attract wildlife such as wading birds, and help prevent erosion at the water’s edge.

The area in which shoreline plants grow is known as the littoral zone, the boundary between land and water. Unfortunately, seawalls have traditionally been placed directly in this intertidal, littoral zone. If you desire to restore a natural shoreline with natural vegetation, you face a complex decision. Begin

Creating Your Florida-Friendly Yard

A Florida-Friendly Yard doesn’t merely offer good-looking landscapes; it also becomes an asset to the environment, protecting natural resources and preserving the state’s unique beauty. Recognizing that the home landscape is part of a larger natural system will help in creating a Florida-Friendly Yard. Designing an aesthetically pleasing Florida-Friendly Yard begins with good decisions based on what you and your landscape require:

1. Your needs and desires
2. Knowing your site’s conditions
3. Maintaining a healthy environment

Whether you are designing on a shoestring budget or hiring a professional landscape architect, understanding a few basic concepts will help you make environmentally appropriate decisions and avoid problems down the road.

Plan First, Plant Last

The secret to creating a successful landscape design is using a logical planning process. Follow the steps outlined below to develop your own landscape plan.

Tip: You might want to read this section in conjunction with The Florida Yardstick Workbook, which you can get from your county’s UF/IFAS Extension office.

http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/yards
replaced with **impervious** surfaces, such as asphalt and concrete, and housing developments with standardized yards that bear little resemblance to native Florida. Expanses of high-maintenance lawns have formed the dominant landscape in most of our communities for years, but that is changing. You can be a part of the movement in Florida to have a more environmentally friendly landscape. Look around your neighborhood or nearby parks to see if any natural landscapes remain. Can your own landscape be changed to replace a piece of what has been lost?

The ideal Florida-Friendly Yard — the smart way to grow — should boast natural beauty that reflects the native landscapes of our state. But this beauty must be created and sustained by environmentally safe landscape practices. What are some of those practices?

- Cooperate with pre-existing natural conditions — instead of working against nature.
- Conserve water and energy — both indoors and out.
- Landscape with native and suitable non-native trees, shrubs and **groundcovers** that will require minimal maintenance when planted under appropriate conditions.
- Choose plants that blend beauty with environmental benefits.
- Use pesticides only when necessary and according to label instructions. Choose least-toxic products and focus on preventing pests.

by inquiring about your city and county ordinances to determine whether removal is an option.

If you can legally replace a shoreline protection structure with a natural littoral zone along your property, your options will be limited by several factors:

1. Depth of your lot
2. Distance from the waterline to upland structures
3. Wave impact against your shore
4. Your budget
5. Shoreline condition of neighboring properties

Shoreline protection alternatives comprise very site-specific considerations, and you need expert advice. The Florida Sea Grant Marine Extension agent in your county, natural resources employees of local governments and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection are good places to find help and information. Keep in mind that submerged land is probably not your property, but belongs to the State of Florida. For information on permitting requirements, contact the Florida Department of Environmental Protection office in your area.
Those Marvelous Mangroves

Beauty, wildlife value and erosion protection make mangroves an asset to a Florida-Friendly Yard. Florida has four native mangrove species:

- Red mangroves (*Rhizophora mangle*) usually live closest to open water. They have arching red prop roots, and their seeds look like green cigars.

- Black mangroves (*Avicennia germinans*) typically grow further upland than red mangroves. Taller than their red and white cousins, black mangroves are the most cold tolerant of the mangrove species found in Florida. Black mangroves send up nobby projections called pneumatophores, which provide oxygen to the tree’s roots.

- White mangroves (*Laguncularia racemosa*) are usually found at higher elevations, interspersed with black mangroves.

- Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*) is not considered a true mangrove by some scientists. It grows most landward of the mangrove species. Once established, it is quite drought resistant and can also withstand flooding, making it an ideal landscape plant for coastal areas.

Some mangrove pruning requires a permit, and the rules are periodically updated.

Florida Neighborhods: Connecting Our Yards to Florida’s Water

Our yards and neighborhoods are channels to our waterways. Your yard is the first line of defense for preserving Florida’s fragile environment. The health of Florida’s estuaries, rivers, lakes, springs and aquifers depends partly on how you landscape and maintain your yard. You don’t even have to live on the water to make a big difference. Rain that falls on yards, roads and parking lots can wash into waterways or leach into ground water, carrying pollutants — including fertilizers, pesticides, animal waste, soil and petroleum products. Improperly applied fertilizers and pesticides from residential areas pose a serious threat to the health of Florida’s waters.

For decades, Florida landscaping has been portrayed as picture postcards of lavish resorts, tourist destinations and tropical gardens. But the pictures of natural Florida are quite different. The Florida Natural Areas Inventory identifies 82 different natural ecological communities in Florida, from wetlands to xeric uplands. Unfortunately, much of the state’s original rich diversity has been lost.

FYN Glossary Box

**Xeric uplands:** very dry, well-drained, high areas of sand with plants adapted to dry conditions; xeric uplands are home to many threatened and endangered species

**Impervious:** resistant to penetration by fluids, such as rain or irrigation water, or by roots

http://sofia.usgs.gov/publications/reports/floridawaters/
revised. Homeowners and the individuals they hire to trim their mangroves are jointly responsible for trimming mangroves appropriately. The booklet Mangrove Trimming Guidelines for Homeowners is available at FDEP’s district offices throughout the state. You can read these materials online at http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/wetlands/mangroves/mangrove.htm.

If you have mangroves, contact the following organizations for information on properly managing these fascinating plants: Florida Sea Grant Extension Program, Florida Department of Environmental Protection and your local government’s natural resources department.

Freshwater Considerations

Lakes, rivers, streams and ponds also have littoral zones, which offer many benefits. Littoral zones:
- Slow the velocity of runoff
- Filter nutrients and sediments from runoff
- Hold soil in place

To protect a freshwater resource from nutrient and pesticide runoff, designate a “maintenance-free zone” of at least 10 feet between your lawn or landscape and the water body. Don’t mow, fertilize or apply pesticides to the littoral zone.


Man-Made Lakes and Ponds

If your property does not border or contain a natural waterway, consider

Other relevant UF/IFAS publications are available online or in printed form. Visit UF/IFAS Extension’s Electronic Data Information Source (EDIS) online at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu and UF/IFAS Extension at http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu. You can search for authors, titles, keywords or publication numbers. Publications in PDF format print best. For printed copies or further assistance, contact the UF/IFAS Extension office in your county and ask about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program.

Florida waters, water resources manual: revised. Homeowners and the individuals they hire to trim their mangroves are jointly responsible for trimming mangroves appropriately. The booklet Mangrove Trimming Guidelines for Homeowners is available at FDEP’s district offices throughout the state. You can read these materials online at http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/wetlands/mangroves/mangrove.htm. If you have mangroves, contact the following organizations for information on properly managing these fascinating plants: Florida Sea Grant Extension Program, Florida Department of Environmental Protection and your local government’s natural resources department.

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building one. A pond is relatively easy to maintain, and it can add value, beauty and ecological soundness to your Florida-Friendly Yard. It does not matter whether your pond measures in square feet or acres, it will contribute significantly to wildlife in your area.

Selecting a good pond site requires evaluating many factors, including slope, soil type, water table, septic tank and house foundation setbacks, and utility easements. When planning, try to strike a balance between what your permit allows and what would fit most naturally into the landscape.

In nature, Florida lakes and ponds feature some common characteristics:

1. They are usually located at the lowest elevation in a landscape.
2. They have a high edge-to-depth ratio — that means that they are wide and shallow.
3. A shallow depth increases the amount of littoral shelf area — the area receiving maximum sunlight penetration. The shelf area provides a place for plants to root and quickly becomes a beehive of pond life activity. Florida ponds less than four feet deep often exhibit complete plant coverage. (It takes 6–10 foot depths to maintain open water.)

Stormwater Control Ponds (Retention Ponds)

If you live on a waterfront, evaluate stormwater runoff patterns to determine if you are inadvertently "dumping" runoff from your landscape directly into the natural waterway. One way to filter runoff is by installing a series of swales and channels, followed by a small pond as a final collection point for runoff.

A pond provides a natural filter for potential waterway pollutants. Vegetation and filter traps act as active filtration systems for pollutants, and the settling action in the pond itself serves as another way to remove pollutants. A well-built pond that supports plant life can significantly improve the quality of water draining into Florida's waterways.

Another advantage these systems offer is extending the "soak time" of stormwater, or increasing the amount of water allowed to percolate. Water that percolates through soil recharges ground water directly, as opposed to water that empties into waterways.

This FYN handbook provides helpful concepts, tools and techniques for creating your own Florida-Friendly Yard — a yard that is beautiful and environmentally friendly. In these pages you will learn the basics of designing a landscape that features carefully selected plants suited to your climate, soil and wildlife. Tips on cost-saving, energy-efficient landscape maintenance are also included to help you reduce water, fertilizer and pesticide use. Waterfront property owners will find helpful information about shoreline management. Whether starting from scratch with a new landscape or considering changes to an existing one, this book will help you create your own beautiful Florida-Friendly Yard.

How to Use This Book

This handbook is arranged in two sections. The first section contains background information that will help you as you make plans to create a Florida-Friendly Yard. The second section offers detailed descriptions of landscape ideas and practices that explain and illustrate the nine FYN principles. To locate a principle quickly, refer to the color-coded tab at the outer edge of each page.

Throughout the book, you will discover glossary boxes that define words that might be new to you, and those words are highlighted when they first appear in the text. Other tip boxes feature Florida Yard Tips — handy, practical tips that explain concepts and share ideas central to creating or maintaining a Florida-Friendly Yard.

The practices discussed in this book can help you do your part to protect our natural resources while maintaining a healthy and attractive landscape.
About the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN) Program

The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN) program is a partnership of the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS), Florida’s water management districts, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), the National Estuary Program, the Florida Sea Grant College Program, concerned citizens, members of private industry and numerous other nongovernmental agencies. FYN addresses the serious problems of pollution in stormwater runoff, water shortages and disappearing habitats by enlisting Floridians in the battle to save our natural resources. The program, which is implemented through the counties’ UF/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service, provides education and outreach activities in the community to help residents reduce pollution, conserve water and enhance their environment by improving home and landscape management.

This integrated approach to landscaping emphasizes nine interrelated principles:

1. **Right plant, right place**
2. **Water efficiently**
3. **Fertilize appropriately**
4. **Mulch**
5. **Attract wildlife**
6. **Manage yard pests responsibly**
7. **Recycle yard waste**
8. **Reduce stormwater runoff**
9. **Protect the waterfront**

FYN is an educational program and not a regulatory agency; however, the FDEP, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and local governments strongly support the program. The best part is that practicing these principles benefits both the environment and you — saving you valuable time and money.

If you find yourself managing one of these natural stormwater filtration systems, follow our do’s and don’ts checklist to maintain them properly:

**POND MANAGEMENT DO’s**

- **DO** plant appropriate aquatic, emergent and upland vegetation — they stabilize soil greatly.
- **DO** use pond water for non-potable irrigation needs.
- **DO** fertilize surrounding areas with the least amount of fertilizer possible, always using a slow-release type.
- **DO** use organic compost in lieu of fertilizer.
- **DO** use mulch around plants to retain moisture.
- **DO** keep pet wastes out of water bodies.

**POND MANAGEMENT DON'TS**

- **DON'T** allow livestock to graze pond bank sides.
- **DON'T** swim in or eat fish caught in stormwater ponds.
- **DON'T** allow invasive plants to clog waterways.
- **DON'T** direct grass clippings into stormwater ponds.

FYN teaches Floridians to create and maintain Florida-friendly landscapes.

Photo by: [Michael Andreas](http://www.stormwater.ucf.edu/)

Shallow ponds, typical in Florida, allow sunlight to penetrate the bottom.
Seasonal Ponds

A common pond type — and perhaps the easiest to imitate as a yard feature — is a shallow “seasonal” pond, typically 2’–5’ deep and 25’–150’ across. Variations in seasonal rainfall cause fluctuations in water level, appearance and function.

In winter, standing water recedes, often drying down completely, depending on the pond’s water depth, soil type and the local water table. But even in this “dry-down” condition, a seasonal pond offers moisture sources, the damp habitats required by many amphibians, reptiles, birds and small mammals.

If you wish to construct a pond to replicate these important habitats, choose an area that:

- accommodates the shallow and wide profile
- already contains suitable plant life and soil types
- provides access for wildlife

Conclusions: Connecting Our Yards to Florida's Waterways

The future of Florida's treasured water resources begins in your yard. The decisions you make — from developing a home site, to landscaping your yard, to fertilizing your lawn — actually influence the health of Florida's natural waterways. Nature doesn't recognize property lines. A rainstorm can wash bare soil, landscape debris, gas, oil, fertilizers or pesticides from one yard to another. A butterfly attracted to one person's wildflowers can flit across a property line into another landscape. Landscapes do not just connect people to the outdoors; they also connect one person's property to the next, forming neighborhoods. Ultimately, yards and neighborhoods are connected to water resources. This connection may be immediate, as in a waterfront community, or gradual, through the flow of storm drains, ditches, streams, rivers and ground water.

For more information on Florida-friendly landscaping, contact the FYN Coordinator at your county's UF/IFAS Extension office (find contact information at [http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu](http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu)) or visit the state FYN website at [http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu](http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu).