

Florida Yards & Neighborhoods

It's Springtime Again!

Now that the weather is becoming consistently warmer and plants are entering their growing season, many people are searching for ways to fix or re-design their yards. They may desire to replace old or failing plants, add new color or just change the view. Whatever the decision is there is always the same task at the end.....cleaning up yard waste.

Recycling yard waste has the potential of saving you money while protecting the environment. Currently, yard waste constitutes roughly 15% of the municipal solid waste in the state of Florida which makes it costly to collect, haul and handle. As taxpayers, we all share this cost so it is in our best interest to find a solution.

The best solution is to recycle the waste where it was produced. This can be done by using the very same tools we are already using. The following list contains some simple suggestions:

Fallen Leaves, Pine Needles, and Grass Clippings -

- Shred with lawn mower, no raking or gathering needed and they fertilize the lawn
- Collect by raking or with lawn mower and apply as mulch to beddings and trees
- Cut, collect and place in a compost pile

Shrub and Tree Prunings -

- Break or cut into small pieces by hand with a lawn mower, a chipper or shredder and apply as mulch

There are many benefits to mulching and there are a wide variety of mulch materials available to homeowners depending upon the desired look and location. The choices range from organic materials such as tree bark, wood chips, grass clippings, leaves or pine needles to inorganic materials such as rocks, gravel or pebbles.

Mulching can save you time and money by preventing water loss and suppressing weeds when kept between 2-3 inches deep. It benefits the plants by regulating soil temperature, reducing erosion and providing nutrients as it decays which means that less fertilizer must be bought and applied. And last but not least, mulch helps to beautify the landscape. Not only does it spice up bedding but it is also useful for walkways and play areas.

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- ### FYN Principles:
- ♦ *Right Plant, Right Place*
 - ♦ *Water Efficiently*
 - ♦ *Fertilize Appropriately*
 - ♦ *Mulch*
 - ♦ *Attract Wildlife*
 - ♦ *Manage Yard Pests Responsibly*
 - ♦ *Recycle*
 - ♦ *Reduce Storm water Runoff*
 - ♦ *Protect the Waterfront*

Keeping Cool By Going Green

Before the invention of heating and cooling systems people had to manipulate their surroundings to adjust to the changing climate. In Florida, the primary challenges were keeping the sun out while allowing air to circulate. For those who lived on the coast, sea breezes kept home temperatures cool, but for those living inland it was a different story.

Now that we have systems that regulate our home temperatures one might think that our problem is solved. Not quite.

Unless a builder constructs a house to be eco-friendly there are still problems that a typical house encounters. Some rooms may be hotter or more humid than others. Patios and porches may go unused due to extreme temperatures.

Many of these situations can be changed by adding the right plant to the right place.

Check out the following recommendations:

- Plant shade trees close to East and West facing windows as they receive 50% more sunlight
- Keep in mind the size and shape of the shade tree since taller, spreading, round and vase shaped trees provide the longest and best coverage but be careful of placement so that limbs will not damage the roof
- Shrubs can provide shade and control the humidity of a house as long as they don't obstruct air currents
- Trellised vines can also provide shade
- Using trees or plants to shade the outside air conditioning unit without blocking air movement can reduce costs
- Using shrubs along the North side of the house can provide a winter wind break
- Vegetation around windows and doors can limit losing cold air in the summer and warm air in the winter
- Groundcovers planted near paved areas reduce the amount of heat stored at ground level and they can grow in areas turf cannot with little or no maintenance
- Using the correct amounts and application frequencies of water and fertilizers reduce plant growth which saves time, money and makes plants less susceptible to pests and disease

“Live in the sunshine, swim the sea, drink the wild air.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Irrigating Your Lawn

Now that your lawns are coming out of their dormant period and beginning to green up, they are going to need a little attention. First, to encourage deep rooting which protects your lawn from drought, water when 50% of the lawn shows signs of leaf blades curling in, it has a blue-gray tint and there is no rain forecast for at least two days. If you have just laid new sod, water at least twice a day for 5-10 days for about 5-15 minutes each time then irrigate about 2-3 times weekly for longer periods.

Lawns typically need 3/4 to 1 inch of water per week. To figure out how much time this will take, you will need to calibrate your sprinkler system. By laying out soup or tuna cans randomly within each zone of your sprinkler system and turning the water on for 15 minutes, you can measure how long it takes to fill them to this amount. Be sure to measure one zone at a time since there may be differences in output.

Next, measure the water in each can by using a ruler to measure to the nearest 1/8 inch. Find the average depth of water that you have collected in all the cans by adding up all the depths and dividing by the number of containers. To determine the irrigation rate in inches per hour, multiply the average depth that you have just calculated by 4. Now you know exactly how much water your lawn receives in a given amount of time.



Recycle, Compost, Recycle!

I think the hardest part of promoting composting is that it sounds like a lot of work. Unfortunately most people don't realize how simple it can be and how rewarding it feels. It's a great way of teaching basic science principles to children and involving them in the conservation of our planet.

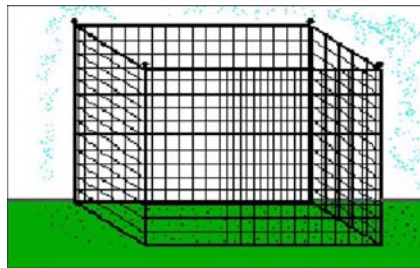
There are many ways to compost. Mother Nature by herself turns all fallen plant materials into compost by the process of decomposition. As homeowners we may choose not to have our yards look so "natural." In that case it is possible to construct or purchase bins to hold yard and or kitchen waste. Typically, the larger the bin the better the heat generation that is necessary for decomposition. The minimum size of a bin is 3'x3'x3'. The choice of composting units can vary though according to the following factors:

- Appearance
- Quantity of material
- Cost
- Desired time for composting
- Labor requirements
- Building Skills
- Possible problems with animals

Problems with animals can be avoided by using sturdy lids or by not depositing kitchen scraps. If you choose to purchase a composting unit the cost is usually higher than if you build it yourself. Either way they work about the same. Some homeowners choose to construct units themselves so that they can handle larger quantities of materials.

They can be made of wire, wood, concrete, or large metal or plastic trash cans. The most important

requirements are that they have holes for aeration and are kept moist but not soaked.



Though it is not absolutely necessary to "turn" or mix the materials, it will accelerate the decomposition. This should be done about every 4-7 days.

The bulk of materials in a bin should be a "brown/carbon" source such as the following:

- Leaves
- Wood Chips/pieces
- Straw
- Newspaper/Paper (shredded)
- Paper plates, cereal boxes, napkins
- Landscape trimmings (cut to less than 2")

The other materials should be a "green/nitrogen" source such as:

- Hair
- Grass Clippings
- Manure from herbivores (vegetarian) animals only
- Fruit/Vegetables, citrus fruit should be cut up into small pieces and covered with 6 inches of brown material

- Coffee Grounds and filter (obtained free from Starbucks)
- Tea Bags
- Egg Shells (adds Calcium)

****Never use pet waste, peanut butter, mayonnaise, or animal by-products such as meat, cheese, bones, or lard.

Materials such as banana leaves and palm fronds are difficult to break down. If they are added they should be cut into very small pieces.

When the compost is done it will be dark brown and crumbly. Any large pieces that are not finished can be screened out and returned to the pile.

Another popular form of composting is "Vermiculture". It utilizes certain worms contained in small bins to turn kitchen waste into nutrient rich plant food in the form of castings (worm droppings) and a liquid that they excrete.

These end products are harvested in two ways. First the liquid should be allowed to constantly drain from holes drilled into the bottom of the bin into another container that rests underneath. Some gardeners call this "worm tea" and it can be applied as a liquid fertilizer.

Second, the castings are part of the compost that you can spread on your landscape. After about 3-5 months the bin should be ready and one of the easiest ways to extract the compost is to push the materials to one side. On the other side place new bedding and scraps along with any unfinished parts from the old materials. Soon the worms will migrate to the new food leaving the finished compost behind to be collected.

Integrated Pest Management

Are your tomato plants being attacked by munching marauders? Are there circular, wilting, yellow patches in your lawn? Well you might want to think twice before spraying harsh chemicals around your home. These chemicals linger as residues in soil, water and foods and are highly hazardous to humans and animals. Integrated Pest Management is the process of using the least environmentally damaging pest control method to solve your problem. There are several methods available such as biological controls, non-insecticidal controls, natural and synthetic products. The best way to know which method will work for your specific problem is to identify the pest and figure out what life-cycle stage it is in.

Most synthetic pesticides are broad spectrum. That means that they kill not only target pests but the beneficial insects that act as a natural pest control against them and because less than 1% of insects are plant attacking pests we are actually doing more harm than good. To make matters worse, after an application of synthetic pesticides, the target pests reproduce faster than the insects that prey upon them. Eventually some pests may even build resistance to these synthetic chemicals.

A biological control is the purchase and release of certain bacteria such as Bt which kills caterpillars or predatory insects such as lady bugs which eat aphids. In order to be effective though, careful identification of the pest must be made.

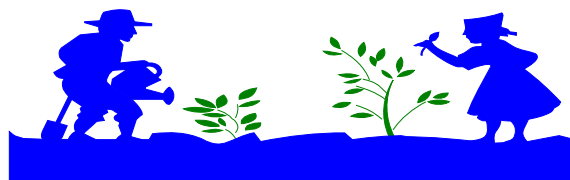
Botanical insecticides usually have very low toxicity to mammals with a few exceptions. Some examples are Limonene and Linalool citrus oil extracts that are poisonous to fleas, lice, mites and ticks. They are sold as sprays, aerosols, shampoos and dips for pets usually under the name "d-Limonene". Neem oil is derived from Neem tree seeds and has insecticidal and fungicidal activity. It is currently sold as ornamental pest control substances. Nicotine sulfate is derived from tobacco and is one of the strongest botanicals available but it is very toxic to mammals so caution is advised when handling. Other benefits of Nicotine Sulphate are that it quickly breaks down and leaves very little residue.

Insecticidal soaps are derived from cottonseed, olive, palm, or coconut plant oils or derived from animal fat like lard or fish oil. They do not leave residues and they are toxic to many pests as long as direct contact is made.

Horticultural oils are derived from petroleum or vegetable oils and are used to control pests and diseases by smothering them. Caution must be taken when applying because plant damage may occur if it is not applied correctly or at certain temperatures. Heavier types of oils are used during plant dormancy while lighter oils are used during growing seasons.

Mineral insecticides such as Diatomaceous Earth is a non-toxic powder that is derived from fossilized shells of diatoms. It cuts and abrades the bodies of insects, drying them out. It controls slugs, millipedes, sow bugs, and soft-bodied insects such as aphids and fleas. Sulphur dust is also non-toxic to mammals but may irritate the skin and eyes. It is one of the oldest pesticides currently in use and works primarily for disease control such as mildews, rusts and blights though it has shown to be effective against mites, psyllids, and thrips.

Integrated Pest Management is an effort to combat pest infestations while sustaining the integrity of the environment. Gardeners and homeowners should understand that some plant loss by pests is natural and usually unavoidable no matter what is used.



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Benefits of a Florida Yard

You'll Have a Quality Landscape

Lower Maintenance

Lower Costs

A Healthier Environment

Florida Yards & Neighborhoods was developed to preserve Florida's natural resources by creating beautiful and environmentally-friendly landscapes. Through stakeholder education and awareness, this program addresses the serious problem of soil and water quality degradation caused by storm water runoff and non-point source pollution.

You don't waste water, fertilizers or pesticides, and Florida's lakes, rivers, bays and wildlife are protected for generations to come.



Meet The New FYN Program Assistant

Jennifer Ramos is the new Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program Coordinator. She has a background in the landscaping industry and a degree in Environmental Science and Growth Management from Rollins College with an emphasis in Florida Ecology and water systems.

Welcome Aboard Jennifer!

References

Information used to create this newsletter were derived from EDIS and other publications at:

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