

Saving Money on an Unsaveable Lawn

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(Article published in Gainesville Sun on October 29, 2016)*

Do you struggle with your lawn and feel like you are losing the battle? You may have resod the lawn, paid landscape companies to take care of it, threw chemicals at it, and dosed it with copious amounts of water. The results ended up with a patchy, weedy mess. With careful planning, appropriate plant choices, and a thoughtful design, you can create a pleasing, low-care, low-cost landscape while reducing your stress about judging neighbors.

On Saturday Nov 5th, UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County is hosting our annual Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) Yard Tour from 8:30am-noon, which will begin at the Rosemont Clubhouse, 6200 NW 35 Terr, Gainesville. At that tour, you can meet Michael Chasteen who spent thousands of dollars trying to maintain and “save” his grass until he spoke to a Master Gardener at Home Depot who introduced him to FFL. He discovered that he can still have a good looking yard without having grass.

Since Chasteen is in a homeowner’s association, he was worried about removing the grass. There is a Florida friendly law that allows you to have a Florida-friendly landscape, but often the homeowner’s association needs to approve of the design first.

During Chasteen’s research of Florida-Friendly plants, he learned about the ones that are the most drought-tolerant and require little maintenance. He decided to plant his front yard with muhly grass, lirope, bulbine, and sago palms and placed pine straw down to keep reduce the weeds and hold in moisture. In his yard description he wrote, “It has been a positive change using less water, therefore less expensive.”

We have four yards in our tour that exemplify most of the FFL principles: Right plant, right place; Water efficiently; Fertilize effectively; Mulch; Attract wildlife; Manage yard pests responsibly; Recycle yard waste; Reduce stormwater runoff; and Protect the waterfront. Various circumstances led these homeowners to adopt FFL, ranging from similar stories as Chasteen’s to wanting to reduce water and environmental impacts since inputs to the lawn are affecting the springs and groundwater.

If you want to create a low-care, low-cost landscape, start with a good design. There are many publications by Extension specialist, Dr. Gail Hansen that can provide ideas, tips, and designs for your landscape. Many of these publications can be found at

http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_lawn_and_garden_design. I'm particularly fond of the publication, "Landscape Design: Twenty-Two Ideas for a Low-Care, Low-Cost Landscape."

The Master Gardeners have labeled all the plants in the selected homes in the Rosemont and Apple Tree neighborhoods. This can help you identify plants in your own yard and get ideas of some plants you can add. Not all the yards are devoid of grass because FFL does not always mean "no grass," just having a landscape that can look good and survive with less input. You can occasionally have a Florida-Friendly yard just by changing your maintenance practices. The Master Gardeners will be available for questions at the tour and will have information booths with all kinds of good material.

Once you are ready to change your landscape, get to know it really well. Find out what kind of soil you have, what areas are full sun, partial shade, and full shade and work with what you have. Research the plants before you buy them to see if they will work for your landscape.

If you want to replace some of your irrigated turf, learn about the Turf SWAP program at the FFL Tour from Stacie Greco with the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department where you can get a rebate of up to \$2000 for creating a Florida-Friendly landscape. The program is expected to be up and running by the spring. For more information about it, details will be provided at www.MyYardOurWater.org as they come available.

This event is free to the public. Each participant will get a 112-page FFL Plant Selection and Landscape Design Guide (or other gift if you already have one) for attending.

Register by calling 352-337-6209 or visiting

www.facebook.com/events/1728073187518322/. I hope to see you there!