# Selecting the Right Plant for You

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Have you ever stared at a sea of plants at a plant sale and have been overwhelmed? Some people like to pick up a bunch of plants and then have to figure out where to put them. Others may look but don't know where to start. This article will give you some ideas on how to select plants for your garden.

The goal of creating a Florida-friendly landscape is to plan first and plant later. This will guide you in planting the right plant in the right place and enjoy healthier plants, reducing your work by using plants suited to your landscape conditions. Some people do the planning process on paper and others do it in their head. Before you head out to a plant sale, take a look at your landscape and inventory certain conditions.

Consider the environmental conditions of your landscape. What areas do you want to fill with plants? Does it get shade, partial shade or full sun? Is the soil well-drained, wet or somewhere in between? What is your soil pH — acidic (4.5-5.5), alkaline (7.0 -8.0) or in between? These factors are important because plants have optimal conditions, so you want to make sure to choose and place plants with those optimal conditions.

What is the function of the plant or plants you want to get? Plants serve many functions in the landscape such as climate control, screens and barriers, and soil protection. Trees, such as live oaks, are very effective at creating shade while shrubs make useful living fences.

What do you want the overall look to be? Landscape design is a big business because it takes into account how the landscape looks. This is a very personal choice. You can select plants to enhance the architecture, hardscape, and existing vegetable by contrasting or complementing the color, form or texture. By using several of the same plant (often in threes), you can create a recognizable pattern that is more visually appealing.

Color is the most attractive and visual characteristic of plants. You can design your landscape by choosing two or three colors that complement each other and repeat it throughout the landscape. Warm, bright colors, like yellows and whites, work well in the shade. Keep into account when the plants bloom or display leaf, fruit or bark color. Aim for having visual impact throughout the seasons.

A variety of texture is also very appealing. Textures are normally described as coarse, medium or fine. A coarse plant, like a bromeliad, makes quite a statement under a fine-textured tree.

You also want to choose different forms to provide contrast. Many times you will see levels of trees, shrubs, perennials and groundcovers. Even among those categories, the form can look quite different.

Take into account the final size of the plant because the plant is small when you buy it, but it will eventually grow into its full size. Don't overcrowd the plants or you'll be moving them later when the root ball is much larger. For trees and large shrubs, take special

consideration on where it is placed and think about its overall size before placing it next to the house, under power lines or in front of your windows. I moved into my house recently and there is a small magnolia underneath the power lines. Knowing how big they get, I know it will eventually be a problem.

There are many elements that go into the design of a Florida-friendly landscape, but don't let that overwhelm you. Find additional step-by-step UF/IFAS EDIS publications on designing your landscape at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_landscape_design.