

Florida-Friendly™

Yards and Xeriscaping



When it comes to our water system and conservation, good yard habits are at the top of the list. While it might not seem important to you now, when you go to buy your first home or condo, you should have a good understanding of your yard and how to make the most of the Florida climate. Have you every helped your parents work in the yard, only to have some of the plants die because of disease, or too much sun? This is quite frustrating, because it is a waste of your money, your energy and the water that you used. Putting plants in the right place is the key to ensuring they survive and remain healthy in your landscape. This process is called **xeriscaping** (we like to call it Florida-friendly), which is landscaping and gardening in ways that reduce or eliminate the need for supplemental irrigation. You can reduce the need for water, fertilizer, pesticides and pruning if you plant Florida-friendly plants.



Understanding Your Environment

The first step to xeriscaping is to understand the soil, sunlight and water conditions of the area you are planting. In Florida, we already know what to expect during our rainy and dry seasons and how much sun to expect at certain times of the year. So, choose plants that match and thrive under the conditions available in your yard and the conditions of our climate. Do you have a lot of shade from the trees in your yard? Do you have sand instead of dirt? What about stormwater runoff? These are the kinds of questions you have to ask yourself when planning your yard.



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What Should You Plant?

When looking at plants, there are a few things to consider. Do some research and learn about problem or invasive plants and avoid planting them at all cost. An **invasive plant** is one that is not native to Florida and may have been brought in through interstate commerce or travelers from other parts of the country and world. These plants have the ability to grow and take over the native plant species and they tend to have an ecological edge since they have no natural enemies in the new environment.

Another thing to consider is to plant a variety of Florida-friendly plants, including flowering and fruiting plants that attract butterflies, birds, beneficial insects and other wildlife. Many Florida **native plants** are especially good at attracting wildlife. This not only gives you variety in your yard, but also allows you to enjoy the native wildlife that you attract. Finally, what kind of grass will you have? You don't just have to worry about plants, also plan grass areas to be functional and easy to maintain. **Turfgrass** is great for xeriscaping and is a popular choice in maintaining Florida-friendly lawns. Turfgrass is also a great choice for conserving water, since it is a drought tolerant grass. Bahia grass is also one of the draught tolerant grasses that is good for the sandy regions in Florida.



How to Water Efficiently

Florida-friendly lawns come in particularly handy when it comes to watering your new yard. This is probably the most beneficial side effect of a Florida-friendly yard. On average, almost **50 percent** of water used by households is used outdoors. That is a lot of water! Why do we use so much if it rains so often in Florida? In many cases, we are overwatering due to poor landscape and irrigation design coupled with mediocre system maintenance practices. If you can create a yard that thrives primarily on rainfall, you can save money on your water bill, reduce your water use and reduce maintenance needs while enjoying an attractive, healthy landscape.

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When it comes to watering your lawn, there are several tips and tricks and resources to help you. Consider using the sprinkler system only to help maintain the life of your yard. Ever seen someone watering their grass while it is raining? That is not only irresponsible; it's bad for the yard. More water does not equal a better yard! Overwatered grass has short roots that make it harder to survive pest attacks, disease and drought. Water your lawn and plants only when you know they need it or show signs of stress. It only takes **3/4 of an inch of water** at each application to make your lawn happy.



Here are a few things you can do to set and forget your irrigation system:

- Use a rain gauge or moisture sensor so you will know if rainfall has done the job.
- Install an automatic rain shutoff device to avoid watering when it's raining.
- Water less often in cooler months and when rainfall is consistent.
- Try waiting longer between irrigations to see if plants can tolerate less water.

Using **reclaimed water** for irrigation is an alternate source of water than using drinking water. This water is sometimes called recycled water and you will sometimes see neighborhoods that have signs indicating that they use recycled or reclaimed water. This water is former wastewater (sewage) that has been treated to remove solids and impurities and then allowed to recharge the aquifer rather than being discharged to the surface water. In most locations, it is only intended to be used for nonpotable uses, such as irrigation, dust control and fire suppression.



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Short Answer

Why is it beneficial to use reclaimed/recycled water instead of potable water for your yard?

Recall and summarize the variables you have to take into consideration when planning your Florida-friendly yard.

What are the benefits to planning a Florida-friendly yard?

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Activity: Planning Your First Yard!

Using the layout below, plan a yard for your new house. Visit www.floridafriendlyplants.com to see kinds of plants you can use in your Florida-friendly yard. Remember to take into consideration sun, shade and soil!

Download and use “Estimated Water Savings Potential of Florida-Friendly Landscaping Activities” and the “FYN Plant Selection Guide” to decide how you might landscape a yard for beauty and for water savings.

