

Celebrate Earth Day
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Special to the Florida Times Union for 4/18/09

Many Earth Day celebrations begin this weekend and continue into next weekend. This is the 39th anniversary of Earth Day. The first Earth Day was held on March 21st, 1970 in San Francisco. March 21st was selected because this is the vernal equinox, the time when night and day are equal throughout the Earth. The earth is thought to be in harmony.



In 1971 Senator Gaylord Nelson announced Earth Week to occur in the third week of April and to celebrate it annually. Since then, activities and festivals have increased each year. Today, Jacksonville will celebrate Earth Day at the Jacksonville Landing from 10AM to 4PM. This is a great family event with lots of educational activities for the kids and a wealth of information for adults on how to recycle, conserve, and preserve our environment. There is free entertainment throughout the day and drawings for neat stuff like a fuel efficient scooter and helmet donated by Beach Blvd. Automotive at the Times-Union booth.

There are many things that you as a homeowner can do to help promote Earth Day by creating a Florida-friendly landscape. Think about how you can change your landscape to conserve energy, fertilizer, pesticides, and water. Here are a few ideas on how to create a Florida-friendly landscape.

Select the right plants. Identify the plants in your landscape and remove any of the invasive exotics. Chinese tallow tree (photo on left), air potato, kudzu, coral ardisia, camphor tree, mimosa, cogongrass and Brazilian peppertree are all examples of exotic invasive plants. For a list and descriptions of these plants, go <http://www.fleppc.org/index.cfm>. Match plants to the site and group them by water, light, and maintenance needs. Choose plants that require very little water and/or pruning once established. If plants require frequent pruning to maintain the appropriate height under a window or eave, move them to another area of the landscape where they are allowed to grow and replace them with a plant that will mature to the preferred height.



Plant more trees. Trees need less supplemental water once established and provide shade which reduces energy bills. They also filter the air, reduce stormwater runoff, and provide a habitat for wildlife. Based on one estimate, a 50% tree canopy can reduce runoff by 25%. Trees shading the west side of a home can reduce air conditioning costs by up to 50%.

Grow something edible. Make the landscape have a dual purpose by planting fruits or vegetables in the landscape. It doesn't have to be a traditional vegetable garden. Fruit trees can double as shade trees and many vegetables can be mixed in to traditional plant beds. Blueberries, vegetables or herbs are also easy to grow in containers.



Use turf wisely. Create functional turf areas for pets, kids, recreational use, paths, prevent runoff, or to filter pollutants. Avoid using turf in long, narrow areas which are difficult to irrigate.

Manage storm water. It's always feast or famine with rainfall so let's capture rainfall to use during droughts. Use rainbarrels or other containers to collect water coming off the roof. Use a series of berms and swales to slow down the flow of water and pollutants to water bodies or to the road.

Use mulch in plant beds. Add a two to three inch layer of mulch around plants to conserve water and reduce weed problems. If you have pine or oak trees on your property, rake the leaves and use in plant beds as a free mulch source. Pull mulch a few inches away from plant stems.

Manage yard pests responsibly. Choose pest and disease resistant plants and keep them healthy. If a problem occurs, identify the pest/disease correctly before treating. Can the problem be resolved by adjusting the irrigation system, hand-picking the insect, or clipping off the diseased plant part? If a pesticide is needed, try using a product that is host specific (bacillus thuringiensis/Bt) or a safer alternative (horticultural soaps and oils) versus a broad spectrum material like malathion or sevin.

Conserve water. Use less water by selecting drought tolerant plants. If matched to the site, many plants require no supplemental irrigation except during an extended drought. If you have an in-ground sprinkler system, adjust irrigation heads to insure good plant coverage and avoid watering roads and driveways. Soaker hoses or other forms of low-flow irrigation can be used in plant beds and vegetable gardens.

For more information on Florida-friendly landscapes, go to <http://www.floridayards.org/>.