

My Florida Home Book 2.6: Taking Care of Outdoor Features¹

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Lawn and Landscape

An important part of successful home ownership is having a useful and attractive landscape around your home. A healthy, well-maintained landscape, yard, and garden can add to the comfort and beauty of your home, increase the value of your home, give you outdoor living and playing space, provide room for your pets, give you fresh, home-grown vegetables and

fruits, help you save water and energy, and provide a backyard wildlife habitat.

Your key elements for designing and maintaining a landscape that serves your family and helps protect Florida's fragile natural environment are:

Right Plant, Right Place

Plants selected to suit a specific site will require minimal amounts of water, fertilizer, and pesticides.

Water Efficiently

Irrigate only when your lawn and landscape need water. Efficient watering is the key to a healthy Florida-friendly yard and conservation of limited resources.

Fertilize Appropriately

Less is often best. Over-fertilizing can be hazardous to your yard and to the environment.

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Mulch

Maintain a 3-inch layer of mulch to help retain soil moisture, prevent erosion, and suppress weeds.

Attract Wildlife

Plants in your yard that provide food, water, and shelter can conserve Florida's diverse wildlife.

Manage Yard Pests Responsibly

Unwise use of pesticides can harm people, pets, beneficial organisms, and the regional environment.

Recycle

Grass clippings, leaves, and yard trimmings recycled on site provide nutrients to the soil and reduce waste disposal.

Reduce Storm Water Runoff

Water running off your yard can carry pollutants such as soil, debris, fertilizer, and pesticides that can adversely impact water quality. Reduction of this runoff will help prevent pollution in our water.

Protect the Waterfront

Waterfront property, whether on a bay, river, stream, pond or beach, is very fragile and should be carefully protected to maintain freshwater and marine ecosystems.

To learn how to put these principles into practice, visit your local UF/IFAS Extension Office or view the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods online video at:

<http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu/FYN/9/fyn91.html>

Gutter

Gutters keep water that flows off your roof away from the foundation of your home. Standing water around the foundation of your home can contribute to mold, termite, and/or structural problems. Make sure water slates away from the foundation of your home.

Not all homes have gutters, though the majority of older homes do. Gutters can become clogged with

leaves, twigs, gravel, acorns, mud and other debris. Deciduous trees drop leaves in the fall; however, in Florida, the Live Oak tree drops leaves year round.

Schedule a routine time of year, such as fall and spring, to inspect your gutters to make sure they are not clogged or broken, and that they are doing their job. If you have mature Live Oak trees growing in your neighborhood, make periodic inspections throughout the year.

When gutters become clogged, water can flow over the edge of the roof, and the weight of the water and debris can cause gutters to sag and pull away from the house. Down spouts can break or come apart at the ground level allowing the water to discharge too close to the home. If this is the case, you will find a hole in the ground where the downspout ends. As an extension to carry water farther from the house into the lawn or shrub area, add a splash block, bricks, or flat rocks under the spout to spread the water as it flows to the ground.

Supplies needed for cleaning gutters:

- Ladder
- Garden hose
- Heavy gloves
- Garden trowel or old pancake turner
- Screw driver

When cleaning gutters:

- Have a helper on the ground to hold the ladder so it doesn't slip.
- Wear heavy gloves to protect your hands from sharp edges of the gutter.
- Use a garden trowel or old pancake turner to remove debris.

Check supports:

- Make sure gutters are fastened tightly to the house and are not sagging.

- If gutters are loose or sagging, tighten or replace fasteners.

Unclog downspouts:

- Place the end of a garden hose in the tops of the downspout.
- Have your partner on the ground turn on the water in the strongest position.
- Snake the hose down the spout until clear water runs out the bottom.

(Source: Home Works News, University of Wisconsin Extension, Fall 2008)