Does your yard measure up?

By following the simple steps inside you can save time and money, make your yard the best it can be, and protect Florida’s environment.
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INTRODUCTION


This Workbook guides you through an evaluation of your yard and yard care practices. Each action you take (or have already taken) earns you "inches" or credits on the Florida YardStick. A yard that measures up to at least 36 inches is a Florida Yard! The payoff — a yard that meets your needs, enhances your neighborhood and helps protect Florida's natural beauty and natural resources.

You can use this Workbook in two ways.

You can first read the FY&N Handbook and then evaluate your yard and yard care practices. Or you can start with the Workbook and use the Handbook as a reference. Under each category in this Workbook you will find references to the corresponding pages in the Handbook.

The Horticulture staff and Master Gardener volunteers at your county's Cooperative Extension Service can provide you with more information and answer questions. They can also tell you about additional services they may provide such as diagnostic tests, workshops, and on-site resources.

Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day and neither is a Florida Yard. Take this adventure a step at a time and have fun!
What does a Florida Yard Look Like?
A Florida Yard can take any form — unique or traditional. In fact, you can create a Florida Yard simply by changing the way you take care of your yard.

Mark all stormdrains with pollution prevention messages, such as “Let only rain down the drain.”

7. Mulched plant beds
8. Rain barrel
9. Stormdrains
10. Street gutters and stormdrains clear of dirt, fertilizers and grass clippings
11. Stormwater runoff from street
12. Stormwater can flow from stormwater ponds into lakes, rivers and bays
With a Florida Yard you win and so does Florida's environment. You don’t waste water, fertilizers or pesticides, and Florida’s lakes, rivers, bays and wildlife are protected for generations to come.

1. Porous surfaces — brick driveway and mulch paths — allows water to soak into the ground
2. Compost bin
3. Wildlife habitat
4. Practical lawn area
5. Native plant buffer along shoreline
6. Trees to shade southern and western sides of home
Good landscape design hinges on one basic concept — the right plant in the right spot. Careful planning and site evaluation are the first steps in applying this concept. The following checklists will guide you through some important considerations and decisions you should make when designing a landscaped area.

Resist (for now) the temptation to rush out and purchase plants. That will come later! If you have an in-ground sprinkler system, or are planning to put one in, make sure the designs for the landscape and sprinkler system match each other.

Florida is a diverse state which includes climatic zones. Soil types, temperature ranges and rainfall patterns differ dramatically from region to region. It's important to remember that a plant that thrives in a friend's yard on the coast may freeze in your yard just a few miles inland. Different conditions often exist in the same yard. The front yard may be high and dry, while the backyard may be poorly drained and soggy.

Once you know your site conditions and have decided how you will use your yard, you are ready to begin with the step of plant selection. The Cooperative Extension Service has resources to help you with your selections. Prioritize your landscape projects, and then work on them one at a time.

1st  **Determine your needs for an area. (A few suggestions)**

___ Play area for children
___ Vegetable/Herb/Fruit garden
___ Screen home from road or neighbors
___ Wildlife habitat/Butterfly garden
___ Water garden/Aquascape
___ Sitting garden
___ Area for entertaining
___ Pet area
___ Storage area
___ Pool, spa, hot tub
___ Outdoor barbeque area
___ Showcase the home
2nd Determine the level of maintenance you want.
(Time needed for mowing, pruning, and weeding. Requirements for water, fertilizers and pesticides.)

___ High
___ Medium
___ Low

3rd Determine the site conditions in your yard.

___ North Florida
___ Central Florida
___ South Florida

___ sandy
___ marl
___ clay

___ full shade
___ partly shaded
___ sunny

___ well-drained soil
___ poorly drained soil
___ compacted soil

___ alkaline soil
___ acidic soil
___ coastal soil

Your county’s Cooperative Extension Service can give you information on how to collect a soil sample for a pH, soluble salts, or complete analysis test.

FLORIDA YARD ACTIONS

- Reduce the need for water, fertilizer, pesticides and pruning by using plants suited to the site conditions in your yard. Credit: 2 inches.

- Group plants according to their maintenance needs. For example, group drought-tolerant plants with low-water needs separately from lawn areas. Credit: 2 inches.

- Determine how much grass you need for children, pets and recreation. Use low-maintenance ground covers, shrubs, mulch or other porous surfaces where possible. Credit: 3 inches.

- Save energy by using trees and shrubs to shade the air conditioner compressor and eastern and western walls of your home. Credit: 1 inch.

- Use deciduous trees or shrubs on southern exposures to allow sun to passively heat your home in the winter. Credit: 1 inch.

- Help stop the spread of invasive exotic plants by removing them from your yard. (Examples... Brazilian Pepper, Melaleuca, Australian Pine, and Chinese Tallow). Credit: 2 inches.

- Reduce yard waste by choosing plants that will not require frequent pruning when they reach maturity. Credit: 1 inch.

- Preserve native plants, especially trees, when building on a new site. Maintain a protective “do not disturb” barrier under the dripline of trees. Credit: 3 inches.  
  ___ Total Inches
Right Plant, Right Spot
(See pages 10-14 in FY&N Handbook)

Choose among plants with these characteristics to reduce maintenance:

- drought tolerant
- pest tolerant
- shade tolerant
- freeze tolerant
- salt tolerant
- slow growing shrubs
- ground covers

4th Create your design plan.

Follow the landscape design steps in the FY&N Handbook to draw plans similar to those below. You can use the graph paper provided on pages 8 and 9. Be sure to indicate where activities will take place, future plans for additions to the home, and your irrigation zones, if you have an in-ground system.

First indicate existing plants, then note site conditions.

5th Choose plants to meet all the conditions you've selected in this workbook.
The Top Five Common Mistakes in Landscape Plantings

Mistake #1: Over-planting.
Small trees and shrubs are often planted too close together to get a "full" look. The result several years later is a crowded landscape. Plants must be removed or drastically pruned to reduce competition.

Solution #1: Resist the temptation to have an "instant landscape." Know the mature size of plants and give them room — and time — to grow.

Mistake #2: Lawn areas are cluttered with trees and shrubs.
Plants scattered throughout the lawn appear unorganized. They also create maintenance problems in terms of mowing, raking, and giving plants the amount of water and fertilizer they need.

Solution #2: Group shrubs and trees in mulched plant beds bordering the lawn.

Mistake #3: Shrubs around the home are too tall.
When plants grow too tall they cover windows and no longer enhance the home's appearance. We usually try to compensate for this "mis-planting" by shearing to control the plant size. This constant shearing weakens and disfigures shrubs. It also creates extra work and yard wastes.

Solution #3: Select foundation plants with an ultimate (mature) size that fits their location. Instead of shearing shrubs, selectively clip stray shoots to keep the plant neat and full.

Mistake #4: Plants are planted too close to the house.
Plants too close to the house have an unattractive "cramped" look. They also create a maintenance nightmare when it's time to repair or paint the house.

Solution #4: Foundation or corner shrubs should be planted half their mature width plus one foot away from the wall. Therefore, a shrub that will grow to be five feet wide should be planted 3 1/2 (2 1/2 + 1) feet away from the house.

Mistake #5: Bright colors are scattered throughout the yard.
Brightly colored foliage, flowers or fruit attract attention. When brilliant color is scattered along the foundation or elsewhere around the yard, it confuses and may overwhelm the viewer.

Solution #5: Concentrate color where accent is desired. The goal is to attract attention to focal areas of the house.

Adapted from "Landscape Design" by Greg Davis, Ph.D., in Master Gardener Update, September 1994.
Create your design plan

Follow the steps in the FY&N Handbook (pages 10 & 11) to design your landscape plan.