

**F**or the twelve-month period from May 2006 to April 2007, Florida had the second driest period on record. This set the stage for the wildfires burning throughout the state in May and June. Since January of this year, 3020 wildfires have burned 310,857 acres on state jurisdiction, and 261 wildfires have burned 146,212 acres on federal jurisdiction. Many rivers and lakes are nearing record low levels.

As a real estate professional who lived through years of extreme drought in San Francisco (1990-1993), I wonder when the first homebuyers in Naples will start to require property sales agreements that include a provision that inefficient water using devices such as older toilets, washers, dishwashers, plumbing devices, automatic irrigation systems will be brought up to current standards.

It now seems like it will be months rather than years before the Florida Legislature eliminates section 373.185(3), which allows deed restrictions, covenants or local ordinances enacted prior to October 1, 2001 to prohibit a property owner from installing a xeriscape or Florida-friendly landscape on his or her property. In my own HOA neighborhood, we are required to keep a percentage of the front yard grass. Rules like these make it impossible to drought-proof your yard.

A Florida-friendly yard doesn't merely offer beautiful landscapes - it also becomes an asset to the environment, protecting

natural resources and preserving Florida's unique beauty and paradise in Naples. Recognizing that the home landscape is part of a larger natural system will help in creating a Florida-friendly yard. And, best of all, a Florida-friendly yard costs less to maintain - no mowing or blowing!!

The University of Florida's Florida Yards & Neighborhoods (FYN) Program provides science-based education to the public on how to create a Florida-friendly yard. Florida-friendly landscaping can be considered an expansion of Xeriscape. A Florida-friendly yard goes beyond Xeriscape, which was started in Colorado, to better fit our unique geography. It includes best management practices concerning stormwater runoff and living on a waterfront. A properly maintained Florida-friendly yard can help homeowners conserve water and reduce pollution of water resources.

The Florida-friendly approach to landscaping emphasizes nine interrelated principles:

- 1. Right Plant, Right Place** Plants selected to suit a specific site will require minimal amounts of water, fertilizers and pesticides.
- 2. Water Efficiently** Irrigate only when your lawn needs water.
- 3. Fertilize Appropriately** Less is often best. Overuse of fertilizers can be hazardous to your yard and the environment.
- 4. Mulch** Maintaining a 3-inch layer of mulch will help retain soil moisture, prevent erosion and suppress weeds.
- 5. Attract Wildlife** Plants in your yard that provide food, water and shelter will attract Florida's diverse wildlife.
- 6. Manage Yard Pests Responsibly** Unwise use of pesticides can harm people, pets, beneficial organisms and the environment.
- 7. Recycle** Grass clippings and leaves provide nutrients to the soil and reduce waste disposal when reused on the landscape.
- 8. Reduce Stormwater Runoff** Water running off your landscape can carry pollutants, such as gasoline, debris, fertilizer, pesticides and even soil that can adversely impact water quality.
- 9. Protect the Waterfront** whether on a river, stream, pond, bay or beach, it is very fragile and should be carefully protected to maintain freshwater and marine ecosystems.

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