

RECYCLE



LANDSCAPING PRINCIPLES FOR FLORIDA-FRIENDLY YARDS

<http://spdn.ifas.ufl.edu/>



RECYCLE

Landscape maintenance activities — mowing, pruning, raking — generate yard waste that you can return to the soil, recycling valuable nutrients. It is easy to recycle yard waste. Try a few of these simple ideas to get started.

- n Compost or mulch with yard wastes to reduce the amount of solid waste to be hauled away. Florida Statutes prohibits disposing of yard trash in landfills.

- n Leaves and pine needles provide a source of mulch that is a real asset in the landscape, and it is virtually free! If your yard generates more leaf mulch than you can use, compost the material or share some with a neighbor.

Photo by: UF/IFAS



Materials generated by the plants in your own yard are a free and easy source for mulch or compost.

- n After pruning trees and shrubs, toss small cuttings into a compost pile or behind a shrub.
- n Never dump grass clippings or other yard waste into storm drains or waterways. Such activities are illegal and can pollute water systems and clog drains. Grass clippings are a significant source of nitrogen, so keep them on the lawn and out of the water.



DEP Recycling:



Recycle While You Mow

Following a few simple tips is all it takes to cultivate a lush lawn.

- n Leave clippings on the lawn to decompose and return nitrogen to the soil. Research indicates this practice improves soil fertility over time, gradually reducing the need for nitrogen fertilization up to 50 percent without a decrease in turfgrass quality.
- n Never remove more than one-third of an individual grass leaf blade at one time.
- n For procrastinators who don't mow regularly, mulching mowers cut grass into smaller pieces, speeding decomposition.
- n If grass grows too tall between mowings, spread clippings behind shrubs or add them to a compost pile to avoid unsightly buildup.
- n Sharpen mower blades monthly to protect against pathogen invasion.
- n If your yard isn't turf intensive, you'll mow less, saving time, energy and money. Where grass doesn't serve a function, opt for low-maintenance groundcovers instead of grass, or underplant trees with shrubs and groundcovers.

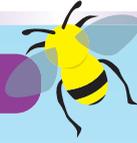


Photo purchased from iStock Photo

Always leave grass clippings on the lawn.



Florida Yard Tip:



Ideal Grass Height

Each turfgrass grows best when it is mowed to a specific height. Turf cut shorter than the recommended height will be stressed and more susceptible to pests and diseases.

- n St. Augustinegrass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) and bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*): Keep at a minimum height of 3"-4", except for dwarf varieties, which can be cut shorter.
- n Centipedegrass (*Eremochloa ophiuroides*): When actively growing, mow every 7 to 14 days to 1 ½"-2".
- n Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*): Cut at a height of ¾"-1 ½". This may require mowing one to three times per week.
- n Seashore paspalum (*Paspalum vaginatum*): Cut at a height of 1"-2".

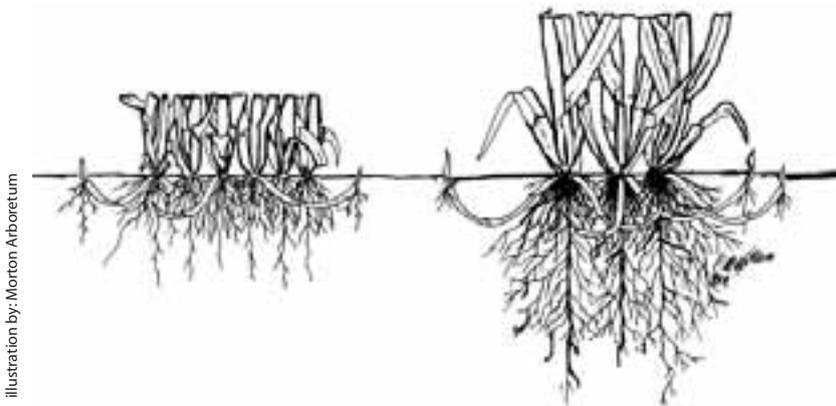


Illustration by: Morton Arboretum

Closer mowed turfgrass (left) is finer textured and denser, but has less underground growth of roots and rhizomes. A deeper root system develops in response to taller mowing heights (pictured right).



Landscape Storm Preparation:



Pruning

Pruning is selectively removing parts of a plant to improve plant health, control growth or enhance fruiting, flowering or appearance. Most often pruning removes shoots and branches.

Photo by: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS



Proper pruning can prevent property damage.

Prune using one of three techniques: thinning, heading back or hedging.

Thinning

What is thinning? Completely removing side branches. In trees, cut side branches back to lateral branches or the main trunk. In shrubs, remove them to the ground.

What does thinning do? Gives a plant an open appearance. Where growth was dense before pruning, afterwards you can see daylight. Thinning encourages new growth inside the plant crown and increases light penetration and air circulation inside the crown. It also results in fewer branches that grow thicker, developing stronger resistance to wind damage.

Heading back

What is heading back? Selectively cutting the tips of twigs or young branches back to a **bud**.

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Bud: an undeveloped or compressed stem

<http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/stormprep.htm>



What does heading back do? Produces a denser tree or shrub because it usually increases the number of shoots and leaves. Place pruning cuts so they aren't visible by locating them inside the plant, covered up by remaining foliage. Use heading back on annuals at planting time to create more flowering stems.

Hedging

What is hedging? Removing shoots or branches from a shrub to maintain a dense row of plants that creates a barrier. Formal hedges feature neatly clipped shrubs; informal hedges let shrubs grow to their natural shape. Formal hedges must be clipped frequently during the growing season; informal hedges can be trimmed annually, enough to keep growth from overwhelming nearby walkways or structures or from shading lawns.

What does hedging do? Establishes and maintains a barrier that can provide privacy or form a windbreak. Correct hedging cuts help a hedge to remain healthy and grow actively from top to bottom. The way to accomplish this is to cut your hedge so that the top is narrower than the bottom. This ensures that light can reach each part of the hedge — which keeps the entire barrier healthy and growing. Make cuts during the growing season when growth is green and tender.

Basic Pruning

Use these simple steps as a guideline for every pruning job you tackle:

- n Remove all dead, diseased or injured branches.
- n Dip pruning shears and saws in a weak alcohol solution (one part alcohol to nine parts water) to prevent spreading diseases between plants.
- n Remove branches that cross or touch each other and any that look out of place.
- n If a shrub is too tall, heading and thinning may both be necessary. Don't use hedge shears, but cut each branch individually to different lengths with hand pruners. This maintains a neat informal shrub with a natural shape.



Calling the Professionals

If you are unsure about proper pruning techniques, consider hiring a **Certified Arborist** to prune your trees. An arborist is a specialist in the care of individual trees. Certified Arborists are knowledgeable about the needs of trees and are trained and equipped through continuing education administered by the International Society of Arboriculture to provide proper care.

To find a Certified Arborist in your area, check out the International Society of Arboriculture's website, <http://www.floridaisa.org> and search by ZIP code.

Pruning trees can be a technical, detailed and dangerous process. Learn more about it online at <http://hort.ufl.edu/woody/pruning>.

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Certified Arborist: an arborist who has passed an exam and receives, on a regular basis, continuing education administered by the International Society of Arboriculture or another certifying agency

<http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/pruning/index.htm>



Florida Yard Tip:



Reduce Your Pruning Load

Keep pruning chores to a minimum by doing things the environmentally friendly way.

1. Select slow-growing plants.

2. Place plants far enough from walkways, driveways or buildings to allow them to reach maturity without encountering obstructions that require hauling out the pruners.



Photo by: Holly Johnson-Shirai pour, UF/IFAS

When pruning trees and shrubs, put small cuttings into a compost pile or use as mulch.

3. Forget the clipped, formal look. Soft, flowing, natural lines are attractive and easy to maintain.



NRCS Backyard Conservation:



Raking

Deciduous trees reduce energy costs by shading a house in summer and, after leaves fall, by allowing sunshine to heat a house in winter. Many new Floridians avoid having deciduous trees in their yards because they believe that fallen leaves require raking. If you desire high-quality turf under trees, then you should rake leaves to improve light penetration to the turf.

Photo by: UF/IFAS



Lilyturf groundcover (Liriope muscari) growing underneath a shade tree borders a self-mulching area along a footpath.

If you do not want turf, permit leaves to remain under trees to form a self-mulching area. Leaves add nutrients to soil as they decompose. If aesthetics are an issue, plant shrubs under trees to avoid raking. They will benefit from decomposing plant litter and help to hold leaves in place so they won't clutter the landscape.

Composting

A common misconception about plant care is that plants require fertilizer. Plants need nutrients, but they might not need added fertilizer. That is because as organic matter decomposes, nutrients are released into the soil in a form that plants can take up. Some key nutrients for plants include nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, calcium, zinc, iron and manganese.



Composted organic matter is dark in color.

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard/>



A great way to supply some of these key nutrients to plants while recycling yard waste is by adding **compost**, which you can make from yard or kitchen waste. As compost decomposes in soil, it releases essential nutrients. Add generous amounts of composted material frequently to soil and it can create the perfect medium for sustained plant health.

Adding compost to soil can:

- n Improve soil structure, texture and aeration.
- n Increase the water-holding capacity of soil.
- n Help loosen compacted soils.
- n Promote soil fertility and stimulate root development.
- n Create a favorable environment for microorganisms, earthworms and insects that are nature's "soil builders."



Compost can be made in a pile.

Composting can be as simple as placing leaves, grass clippings and small cuttings behind shrubs or in a hidden corner of the yard and letting nature take its course. Homemade or manufactured compost bins allow you to easily incorporate kitchen waste, such as vegetable and fruit scraps, eggshells and coffee grounds. Numerous types of compost bins are commercially available; many are attractive. Gardening magazines, catalogs and garden centers are good sources for composting products. For more information, visit Florida's Online Composting Center at <http://compostinfo.com>.

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Composting: the process of converting plant and animal waste into useful soil additives



EPA Composting Site:



A compost pile needs adequate moisture, oxygen, nitrogen and carbon sources to generate the right conditions for decomposition. The more closely you monitor and manipulate these factors, the faster decomposition can occur — and the sooner you will have rich compost for fertilizing plants and amending soil.

Follow these tips for successful composting:

- n Bins are not necessary, but they help keep piles neat, retain heat and moisture and prevent complaints from neighbors. The minimum recommended size is one cubic yard (three feet square by three feet high).
- n Composting can take as little as four to six weeks or as long as one to two years, depending on the size and type of material in the pile and the amount of attention you give it.
- n Proper moisture is necessary for microorganisms to decompose the material. Covering the pile retains moisture and prevents the decomposing material from getting too soggy when it rains. You should not be able to squeeze water from the material produced at the bottom of the pile.
- n Heat is important in composting, so a sunny location is better than a shady one.
- n Combining different materials in the pile, such as grass clippings and leaves, will achieve the right proportions of carbon and nitrogen for effective composting.



Photo by: UF/IFAS

Compost bins with several compartments aid in turning the material.



Photo by: UF/IFAS

Compost can also be made in a manufactured bin.

<http://www.epa.gov/compost/>



- n Always bury kitchen waste inside the pile to discourage pests and to prevent odor from rotting fruit and vegetables.
- n Generally, for fastest composting, turn the pile with a pitchfork or stir it on a weekly basis in warm weather. Stabbing the pile with a length of pipe or rake handle will help aerate and mix the material.
- n Never place meat, animal fat or dairy products in a compost pile.

Florida Yard Tip:



The Squeeze Test

To find out if your compost pile is getting too much water, try this test. Grab a handful of compost from the bottom of the pile. Squeeze it. You shouldn't be able to squeeze drops of water from the composted material.



Squeeze test illustrating adequate moisture (above) and excessive moisture (below).

