



New Water Conservation Program

by Lisa Strange, FYN Community Association Coordinator

One of the most important steps in maintaining healthy turf and landscapes is to avoid overwatering. Irrigation systems should be inspected on a regular basis and used correctly for optimum efficiency. This includes resetting automatic timers when power outages throw systems off schedule. Consider turning timers off during the rainy season and irrigate only as needed. Updating older systems and adding soil-moisture sensors can save even more water and reduce utility bills. Considering the nine principles that integrate the Florida-friendly approach to conserve water and protect our natural resources—right plant/right place, water efficiently, fertilize appropriately, mulch, attract wildlife, manage yard pests responsibly, recycle, reduce stormwater runoff, and protect the waterfront—is a way that everyone can contribute at some level. It's not just what you plant and where, it's using the water responsibly.

Recently, I read a timely article from the Southwest Florida Water Management District about implementing Florida Water Star standards in new

homes, thereby ensuring water conservation and giving residents an opportunity to save money on utility bills—all while protecting our state’s water resources. The following article was excerpted in its entirety from the September/October 2008 issue of *WaterMatters: Program Urges Home-builders to Go for “Gold”*

Homebuilders in the District will soon have an edge over their competitors through a new certification program that will bring “gold” to “green” homebuilding practices.

The District’s Florida Water StarSM Gold (FWSG) certification program, launching this January, will certify and recognize builders who incorporate water-saving efforts into new homes. The program is a points-based certification that addresses indoor, irrigation, and landscape conservation components.

“Builders realize they have a responsibility to conserve and protect our natural resources,” said Sylvia Durell, FWSG project manager. “The FWSG program provides an easy-to-follow plan that will positively impact the water resources.”

Both the builders and buyers will benefit from a FWSG-certified home. FWSG-certified homes are expected to have lower utility bills and require less maintenance by using low-flow plumbing fixtures, dual-flush toilets, ENERGY STAR appliances, efficient irrigation systems, and a low-maintenance, Florida-friendly landscape. In addition, buyers will have peace of mind knowing their home is equipped with technology such as a water shutoff system for appliances, including washers, dishwashers, and toilets, to stop the flow of water when a leak is detected.

“These enhancements add curb appeal and value for homeowners,” said Durell.

At the same time, builders can market the attractive features while demonstrating their commitment to the community by minimizing impacts on water resources.

The District’s Florida Water StarSM Gold certification program is an upper-tier version of the Florida Water StarSM Silver certification program, originally developed by the St. Johns River Water Management District in 2006. The District has collaborated with St. Johns to develop the “gold” level.

Through the District’s partnership with the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Science’s Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program, several existing landscaping and water conservation programs are already in place. Therefore, District staff recognized a need for advanced criteria to ensure consistency among current practices. The District will only promote the advanced level.

Future plans to expand the program include homeowner, community, and commercial certifications.

Susan Douglas was recently hired as FWSG coordinator. For more information about the District’s FWSG certification program, please contact Douglas at (352) 796-7211, ext. 4752.

Contact your local county UF/IFAS Extension office for more information on Florida-friendly landscaping or visit floridayards.org. To order one (1) free Florida-friendly handbook and plant list from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, go to WaterMatters.org. For more information on the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program go to <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

The FYN Community Association Outreach program in Hillsborough, Polk, Pinellas, and Pasco counties is funded by the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the Boards of County Commissioners. ■

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