

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™

In The Community

Quarterly Newsletter Published By: UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough County, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™



**Keep Your HOA Landscape
Florida-Friendly Year-round
with Seasonal Maintenance**



Seasonal care plan aligned with
Florida-Friendly Landscaping™
Principles for Communities. **pg. 2**

**The 2025 Tampa Bay
Water-Wise Awards**



The City of Tampa and
Hillsborough County Water
Wise Award Winners! **pg. 3**

Seasonal Landscape Maintenance Tips for Home-Owners. **pg. 2**

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Seasonal Maintenance with Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) principles keeps your yard healthy and resilient.

Heading into spring after our cold winter and late frosts, seasonal landscape maintenance with Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) principles builds tougher yards. Most plants will rebound quickly with the right care. Follow these tips to recover from frost damage and avoid common pitfalls.

Assess Damage First

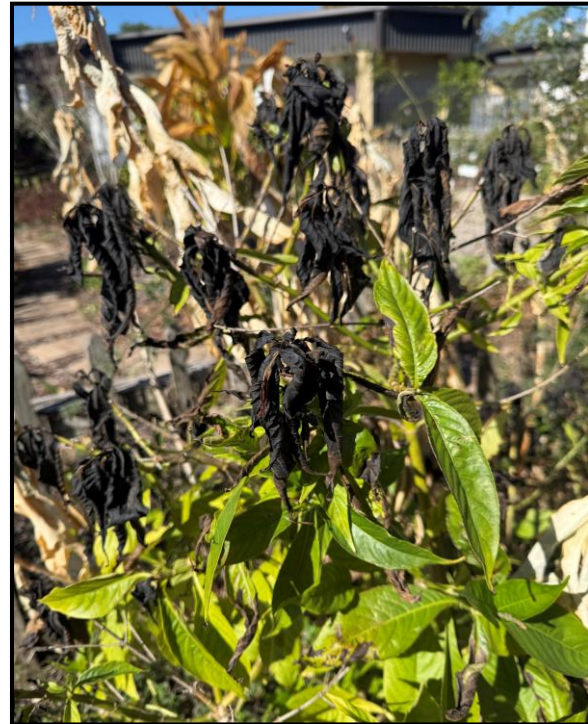
After the last frost, typically mid-March in Hillsborough County, carefully inspect plants for blackened tips, wilted leaves, or mushy stems. These signs signal frost-killed tissue. Wait 1-2 weeks before pruning to confirm what truly survives. Scratch the bark to check for green cambium underneath, which indicates viable recovery potential. Use clean, sharp shears to remove only damaged sections. Cut back to live wood or healthy buds to encourage strong regrowth.

Water and Fertilize Smartly

Once soil warms, deeply water established plants to support root activity and new growth. Steer clear of overwatering our heavy Florida clay soils, which stay soggy longer. In early April, apply a slow-release, low-nitrogen fertilizer sparingly. This aids recovery without spurring tender shoots that late chills could harm. Top with 2-3 inches of mulch, such as pine bark or leaves, around plant bases. Avoid trunk contact to lock in moisture and stabilize soil temperatures.

Spring Preparation Checklist:

- ❑ Cold-sensitive plants: Wait until mid-March, after our last typical frost date in Hillsborough County, to lightly prune any damaged plant materials. This timing allows plants to show true recovery signs and promotes a quick, vigorous rebound.
- ❑ Lawns: Set mower height to 3-4 inches as St. Augustine greens up. Aerate compacted spots before rains arrive to improve drainage.
- ❑ Trees/shrubs: Inspect for freeze-induced canker wounds or cracks and seal them promptly. Swap in resilient Florida-Friendly natives like beautyberry for long-term hardiness.
- ❑ Pest watch: Monitor stressed plants for scale or aphids. Treat with horticultural oil sprays to safeguard pollinators over harsh chemicals.



The 2025 Tampa Bay Water Wise Award Winners!

Tampa Bay Water Wise Award winners prove you can have a beautiful yard and still conserve water. Their landscapes show off creativity, color, and serious commitment to conservation.



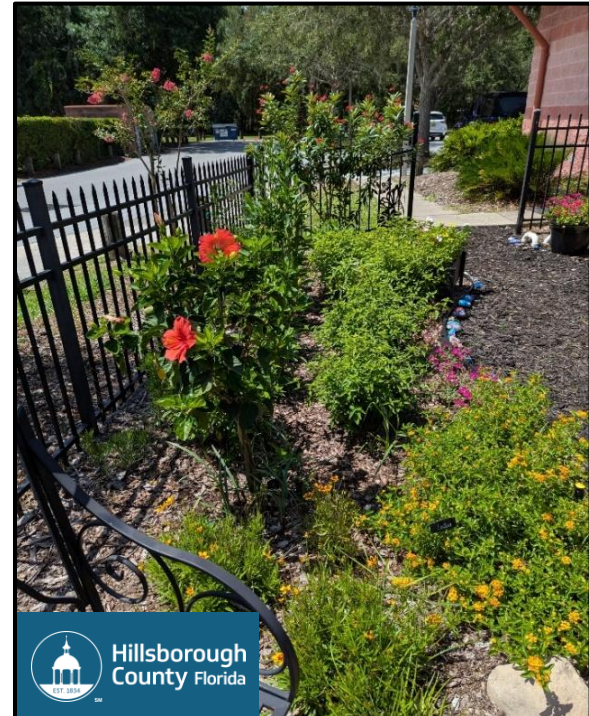
The 2025 Tampa Bay Water Wise Award winners showed that landscapes can be attractive, water smart, and Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ all at the same time, using drought-tolerant plants, efficient irrigation, and designs that slow and soak in rainwater instead of sending it to the street.

This year's **Hillsborough County** Winner features drought tolerant trees and plants, self-mulching areas under trees, and plants chosen for the site. Plants are grouped by similar water and maintenance needs, and pervious materials are used for paths and walkways to let rain soak into the ground.

This **City of Tampa** winner is a great example of a Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ yard that would work well in a homeowner's association setting. It uses drought tolerant plants, self-mulching areas under trees, no narrow turf strips, and groups plants with similar water needs to decrease water and maintenance. Pervious paths and directing roof runoff into mulched or planted areas help rain soak in and be used by plants instead of becoming stormwater runoff.

Both winners prove that Water Wise practices fit many styles, from cozy historic neighborhoods to spacious suburban lots, while still protecting our shared water resources. Their yards are great local examples for anyone thinking about entering the Tampa Bay Community Water Wise Awards next year

Visit <https://awards.tampabaywaterwise.org> for more information and to enter your landscape in 2026.



How to Apply for the Home Yard Recognition Program in 2026

If your yard already follows Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles, you may be closer to official recognition than you think. The statewide Home Landscape Recognition Program celebrates yards that protect water, wildlife, and our shared environment.



Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ PROGRAM

It's a friendly, educational process, and even if you don't qualify right away, you'll leave with a clear plan for getting your yard recognition-ready.

- **Step 1:** Learn the basics by reviewing the nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles and the home landscape checklist online.
- **Step 2:** Make any needed changes—things like right plant, right place, proper mulching, responsible fertilizing, and appropriate irrigation.
- **Step 3:** Contact UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough County with any questions about the checklist or application process.
- **Step 4:** During the visit, an Extension agent or trained representative walks your yard with you, goes through the checklist, and lets you know if you qualify.
- **Step 5:** Yards that meet the criteria receive a certificate and a recognition sign to proudly display; recognitions are typically valid for four years before reevaluation.

Scan this QR code to visit our Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Home Yard Recognition blog for application details, the full checklist, and photos of past recognized yards.



Early Spring To-Do's for Your Yard & Future Events at UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough County

As we move into early spring, it is a great time to give your landscape a gentle reset so plants head into the growing season healthy and Florida-Friendly Landscaping™.



A few early spring tweaks now can save you time, water, and money all summer while moving your yard closer to award or recognition ready.

- Check your irrigation system and run a short test cycle. Look for broken or tilted heads, leaks, and spray hitting sidewalks or the street. Then make quick fixes before it gets hot.
- Refresh mulch to a 2–3-inch layer in planting beds to hold moisture, cool the soil, and reduce weeds, but keep mulch pulled a few inches away from trunks and stems.
- Walk your yard and note any plants that struggled last year. Plan to replace those with better “right plant, right place” choices that match your light, soil, and moisture conditions.
- Start grouping container plants and new additions by similar water needs so you can irrigate more efficiently and avoid over- or under-watering.



Check out what's happening this spring at UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough County. We have classes like the [Triple Workshop](#), [FFLHC Webinar Series](#), [Microirrigation Webinars](#), and more workshops and outdoor programs for gardeners, homeowners, families, and community leaders—many low-cost or free.

Scan this [QR code](#) to check out our spring events and more. Sign up on Eventbrite for low-cost classes and programs that fit your schedule.





We Can Help!

Master Gardener Help Desk



What we help with:

- Troubleshooting plant and lawn problems
- Soil pH testing
- Insect, plant, and disease identification
- Vegetable and fruit tree growing assistance
- Nutritional recommendations

Bring if you can

- Clear photos of the issue
- Fresh plant or insect sample in a sealed bag
- Notes on sun, soil, watering, and recent products use

How to reach us

In Person

5339 County Road 579
Seffner, FL 33584
Monday–Friday
8 am–5 pm

By Phone

813-744-5519
ext 54102

By Email

hillsmsg@mail.ufl.edu

**Scan for Help Desk information
and how to become a Master
Gardener Volunteer.**

