Florida Yards and Neighborhoods

PUBLIC EDUCATION & OUTREACH PROGRAM

Plan Elements

- Target Audience
- Activities and Materials Used
  - Identified with target audience
  - % of audience reached
- Distribution methods
- Annual Schedule
- Documentation
- Trainer Identification
- Allocated Resources
- Goal Assessment

Program Goals

A goal of the residential landscaping program called Florida Yards and Neighborhoods is providing science-based and UF/IFAS-approved recommendations to citizens of Lee County. Objectives include showing homeowners and members of community associations significant ways to care for their landscapes by using fewer inputs. They follow a standardized checklist of methods to reduce water, fertilizer & pesticides. As a result of FYN workshops and classes, official yard recognition program and certification programs for new communities and developments, outdoor water is conserved, waste and pollution is reduced, erosion is prevented, water quality is improved and more functional, attractive and ecologically-sound surroundings are creatively designed and maintained that complement existing homes and soon-to-be built, residential or public structures.

Target Audience

ALL citizens of Lee County, both permanent and temporary residents, should be aware of their own (DIY), as well as those they hire (GI-BMP trained or untrained) potential to pollute ‘local’ waterways by misapplying fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation (both fresh and reclaimed) water. However, the opportunity to reach all citizens requires multiplying and training volunteers, program staff assistants, interns and other environmental leaders willing to partner with UF/IFAS extension. FYN concept training is given to the Lee County Master Gardeners, park and
recreation employees, government and environmental inspectors, GI-BMP landscape professionals and county leaders. Trained volunteers, in turn, become FYN workshop instructors, tour guides, join the yard recognition team or become extension program advisors.

**Methods & Materials**

Use online, university, state DEP or county-developed resources and recommendations. including maintaining a landscape display showing the nine concepts of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™: Right Plant, Right Place, Water Efficiently, Fertilize Appropriately, Mulch, Attract Wildlife, Manage Yard Pests Responsibly, Recycle Yard Waste, Reduce Stormwater Runoff, and Protect the Waterfront.

- **FYN Introductory Workshop** For Lee County, 90 to 180 minute ‘indoor’ classes are offered regularly. At a minimum, classes are offered weekly in-season and monthly off-season targeted to reaching the general public. Sessions are scheduled for weekdays & weekends to reach more diverse resident populations. Regular FYN classes are scheduled and currently cost $8 per household. The cost includes a FLDEP and UFIFAS FYN handbook, a South Florida Waterwise Guide and other relevant publications and fact sheets. A handout provides to homeowners a FYN checklist of practices they can adopt to minimize the application of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides while promote actions steps towards redesigning the landscape. One facility is used regularly. It is the Staff Support Services facility at Rutenberg Community Park, 6490 South Pointe Blvd., Ft. Myers, FL 33919. Other places where the FYN classes are occasionally taught are Rotary Park in Cape Coral and the Lee County Extension Service meeting rooms in Terry Park. All FYN classes are promoted on extension's on-line website and county calendars. In 2011, 2,380 people attended FYN sponsored group events & guided walking tours located at Rutenberg Park.

- **Guided Walking Tour:** In addition to classroom training, guided FYN walking tours are provided FREE to the public. Community groups also schedule with the FYN agent to attend walking tours. Scheduling a guided tour is flexible with staff and/or trained volunteers reaching numerous HOAs, its members, boards and committees. Walking tours are open to all resident. Tours last from 45 to 90 minutes. A 5,000 square foot teaching garden provide the ‘right plant, right place’ talking points. State-issued signage provides the nine FYN concepts and FFL practices to adopt. The demonstration is centrally located, has ADA approved walkways and is used for most FYN park employee training as well as most public workshops and classes. The location of the garden is in South Ft. Myers within a 30 to 45 minute drive from the heavily-populated coastal areas of Lee County. Installed in 2006 and maintained by FYN staff and Master Gardener volunteers, seasonal as well as year-round resident attend workshops, the garden
attracts visitors on their own. In addition to the FYN display garden at Rutenberg, FYN display gardens and/or classroom facilities are used for classes and/or tours in Terry Park, Manatee Park in Ft Myers and Rotary Park and the Cape Coral Historical Society grounds in Cape Coral.

- **Native Plant Sales** – FYN provides informational display tables at three native plant sale events each year as well as planning manned, ‘Ask the Expert’ tables at public gardening events in other parts of the county including horticulture events held at Terry Park, the Edison and Ford Winter Estate, garden walks at Lakes Park, community and farmers markets including annual events sponsored by the Pine Island Garden Club, Alva Garden Club and the Cape Coral Garden Clubs. In all thousands of residents as well as visitors to Lee County attend one or more of these events each year.

- **FYN teaching resources** – Resources include numerous IFAS and county website pages. They include web links and information created specifically to meet Lee County GI-BMP Ordinance 08-08 described on the ‘Fertilizer Smart’ website. The public can obtain any number of fact sheets, guide books, brochures, posters, signs, reference guides, frequently asked question resources on the lobby display tables at Terry Park and at FYN’s satellite office at Rutenberg Park. Terry Park is open to walk-in customers from 8am to 5pm weekdays while the Rutenberg Park facility has public access every Wednesday morning and afternoon.

- **Rain barrel and rain garden workshops and resources** address issues of controlling erosion, reducing pesticide use and protecting the waterfront. 348 rain barrels were distributed in 2011, 1,882 rain barrels (55 gallon size) are out in the county being used. FYN was recently offering rain barrel construction classes in 2006 offering 6-8 workshops annually. FYN was responsible for creating multi-media resources (a video and instructional manual) for homeowners to use for building rain barrels and rain gardens.

- **Horticulture Help Desk** This reference desk at the extension office at Terry Park responds to thousands of individual requests annually from the public. Most questions asked relate to reducing or targeting pesticide applications and/or finding low maintenance methods to maintain healthy ornamental and edible landscapes. Information is supplied to the public by trained Master Gardeners and a Horticulture program assistant. All receive customer service basic training.

- **Enhanced sustainable landscaping resources** Sustainable outdoor and indoor display and demonstration structures, equipment and methods were installed at Rutenberg Park. Reduce, reuse, and recycle kiosk information is available at meetings or on Wednesday’s. Combined with the existing FYN learning stations outdoors, these recently completed (2011) building and grounds enhancements extends the FFL message to living more sustainably. Enhancements demonstrate innovative technologies and homeowners are interested in adopting. The improvements model actions they can also
do in and around their homes to save and protect water quality. The enhancement reach more diverse audiences and professionals with particular interests in water harvesting, landscape design, solar energy savings and micro-irrigation distribution systems. Some of the equipment is used for more advanced training for Master Gardeners, public school teachers, county parks employees and others. The enhancements include 1,500 gallon capacity, in-ground and above-ground rain water cisterns, low-volume micro-irrigation system using filtered rain water, rain barrels, composters, fertilizer box, worm bin, mulch display, wildlife displays as well as 90 different, native and Florida-Friendly plants displayed on the grounds, in specially designed rain gardens and by using solar energy to power solar panels and equipment indoors and outdoors. Finally an on-the-water wildlife, littoral planting gives homeowners living on the water ideas for replacing turf along a 6 foot or more waterfront buffer on a fresh water detention pond.

- **FYN advisory and volunteer FYN training** - On average, 30 adults become spokespersons for the FYN program each year. Most attend 84 hours of training to become Lee County Master Gardeners. The FYN program relies on 87 or more volunteers annually and includes FYN advisors who: lead guided tours, teach FYN classes, participate in an on-line speaker’s bureau, plan conferences, workshop series and conduct yard recognition visits. These 87 volunteers contributed 2,642 hours in 2011.

- **On-site walk-abouts in planned communities** The FYN agent and the horticulture agent schedule walking tours within gated communities to assist homeowner committees and boards reduce maintenance while selecting appropriate plants for locations on or off the waterfront. Walk-abouts assist do-it-yourself homeowners, HOA residents served by GI-BMP trained landscape professionals as well as solving problems for homeowners living in RV parks and condominiums complexes.

- **Mangrove symposium** – Preserving mangrove requires properly trained landscape contractors and homeowners to prevent plant and forest injury. In 2011 session, a post-class survey found 100% of the attendees (n=32) increased their knowledge of FFL resources, mangrove rules & laws and increased their understanding of the role mangroves play in protecting Lee Counties' waterfront.

- **Educational Outreach in Schools**– There are approximately 82,000 students in Lee County Grades K-12. Last year, Extension's educational outreach program included participation with a green ‘recycling’ bus. The bus worm composting demonstration reached 1,031 elementary school students. Presentations on worm composting included a discussion on reducing fertilizer use by using worm castings as a slow-release fertilizer alternative. In addition, 60 science teachers representing 45 different schools received worm composter training at the Rutenberg Park center impacting approx. 1,680
students, ages, K-12. Worm bins were used in about 25 or more classrooms to minimize student’s organic food waste. Estimated percent of student audience reached: 3%.

- Florida-Friendly Landscaping Signs– A volunteer, FYN yard advisory team conducts monthly visits with homeowners’ seeking to have their yards recognized in FFL. Those homeowners qualifying are issues a yard sign and completion certificate. Both acknowledge that they have met the minimum requirements for showing their neighbors what is a Florida-Friendly yard. Since 2008, 80 homeowners, community landscaping committees and businesses adopting FYN water-saving and other outdoor FFL practices. Approximately, one in every 25 people who attend an FYN Introductory workshop follow-up with the agent and ask to have their yards inspected and recognized by the FYN program.

- Website – The FYN program webpage currently contains information on preventing water pollution and controlling erosion by using the nine FYN concepts. There were 57,607 website visits to the Lee County FYN pages in 2011.

**Distribution Methods**

Florida-Friendly Landscaping outreach materials will be distributed as described above.

**Annual Schedule**

- The Lee County FYN program reached homeowners, HOAs, school students and teachers in 2011. Clientele contacts with the FYN program totaled 14,808. 45% of the contacts were in 176 group learning events (classroom, guided tours, etc.) Estimate of audience reached – 2.5%. The other 55% were by other methods of contact including field visits, office visits, phone or email.

- Weekly guided, walking tours of the FYN landscape demonstration every Wednesday

- In-season weekly class series for designing, installing and maintaining Florida-Friendly landscapes while protecting the environment. Multi-session homeowner series have included a 14 part, ‘Designing with Nature’ series and a nine part, FYN Concept series specifically designed for Lee County residential neighborhoods.

- Website access is 24-7.

**Documentation**

- The FYN agent reports number of events held, group participation, clientele contacts, impacts and outcome data including the activities and hours offered by volunteers.

- An annual extension report and ROA/POW document the FYN agent’s program accomplishments including success stories.
- The number of attendees at GI-BMP delivered classes. Over 2,000 GI-BMP attendees have qualified since 2008. A post test documents their ability to seek a business license to use fertilizers properly in Lee County un-incorporated.
- Number of FYN recognition team visits annually with homeowners and the number of community associations contacted or visited annually by the FYN agent.
- A web counter provides detailed, monthly web usage reports.
- The horticulture help desk calling and office visit numbers are summarized in monthly reports. Volunteer efforts are documented in a Master Gardener state recordkeeping system and in an Excel Lee County Parks and Recreation volunteer management database.

**Trainer Identification**

A University of Florida/IFAS/FYN program extension agent implements FFL programs for homeowners and others. He utilizes trained volunteer advisors, master gardeners and instructors, many of which have been previously trained or are retired professionals. Some were teachers, administrators and scientists. Other FYN supports comes from members of the Lee County horticulture extension team including the Ag & Natural Resources agent, the horticulture help desk program assistant and the horticulture agent/county extension director. In addition, a part-time contractor conducts GI-BMP instructional support and classes on a monthly basis including GI-BMP classes taught in English and Spanish.

**Allocated Resources**

Sufficient funding shall be allocated through the Lee County extension service staffing budget. The Lee County Board of County Commissioners provides significant support to Lee Counties FYN program. They ensure that facilities and programming dollars are provided by an agreement with the Lee County Parks and Recreation Department and the University of Florida. Other resource support is provided by a UF/IFAS/Florida-Friendly landscaping state office in Gainesville and a District 4 regional IFAS REC office in Immokolee, FL

**Goal Assessment**

A number of methods will be utilized to assess an increase public awareness and behavior associated with this program.

- Informal survey tools are often used with homeowner classes. Some pre- and post test evaluations are also useful especially when conducting training. Both types of tools evaluate the public knowledge and/or adoption of Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Practices. An increase in awareness of common landscape mistakes is also expected.
• An increasing number of county staff and citizens visiting and using two or more FFL techniques within the first 6 months to a year after the FYN class.
• An increase in the number of website hits associated with expanding web educational pages.