

Florida-friendly yards are beneficial to lagoon

I would like to thank Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers, generally, for its coverage of the issues facing the Indian River Lagoon, and specifically, for the coverage it has given to the idea of removing one's lawn and replacing it with more Florida-friendly landscaping.

There are many benefits to be realized by getting rid of a grass yard. Foremost, it will benefit the lagoon. Grass yards often use a lot of nitrogen- and phosphorus-based fertilizer. Not much fertilizer comes off an individual yard, but, cumulatively in Indian River County, about 400,000 pounds of nitrogen leaves our yards and ends up in the lagoon, imperiling the health of the waterway.

Florida-friendly yards need little to no fertilizer, so a homeowner who makes the conversion not only saves money on fertilizer, but almost immediately helps the lagoon. I put down my last bag of fertilizer a year ago and my yard is doing fine without it.

Other benefits follow. I removed the last of my



lawn in December, shortly after my lawn mower broke. Not only did I not have to replace the mower, I have freed up room in the garage. As my other yard tools are battery powered, the garage is slowly losing the gas smell it has had for decades.

As the lawn is replaced with plants such as firebush, marlberry and milkweed, the benefits add up. Birds, bees and butterflies multiply, as do the colors in the yard. Recently, I counted seven caterpillars on just two milkweed plants, so I know more butterflies are on their way. It is true that going Florida friendly is not for the faint hearted. Start to finish, my conversion will take four years and accomplishing the task means I spend at least four hours a week in the yard. At this point it is well worth the effort and I

have some suggestions for others who may want to go grassless.

Many homes in our community went Florida friendly before me. Sandfly Lane in Old Riomar is one of the most beautiful areas of Vero Beach. From the street, the vast majority of the yards have little or no lawn. Areas of Summerplace have never had grass yards. Get ideas for your yard by looking at what others have already done. Add trees! One reason Sandfly works so well is because it has a lot of trees, particularly live oaks. Once established, trees not only look good, they provide shade and, like most Florida-friendly plants, need a lot less water than lawns, helping to conserve this resource for other uses.

Unless you have a lot of very good friends, do not try to convert your entire yard at once. Do an area at a time. It's your yard, so leave some grass areas, especially if you have children. If your experience is like mine, you will soon find that your yard is more interesting, that it is giving you back more than you

put into it — more color, more butterflies and bees, more wildlife. Quite simply, more reasons to spend more time in it.

Until recently, I thought that documents of many property owners' associations might prevent an association member from going Florida friendly. However, a reader responding to an editorial in the paper let me know that in its last session the Florida Legislature passed a statute prohibiting an association from preventing a homeowner from going to Florida-friendly landscaping.

Nonetheless, I would recommend that every homeowners association near the lagoon review their documents and remove any language that would discourage members from having Florida-friendly yards. They might then go one step farther and replace any lawn in the common areas with more exciting Florida-friendly flora.

We will all benefit from the change.

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