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Have you ever tried to persuade somebody to buy something they felt they didn't need or were impartial about? Not easy. The need and responsibility to conserve water is one of those things that too many people are detached from. Thanks to Bill Marcous of the City of Sanford, FL for arranging this Tip Sheet. It explains how the City of Sanford has joined hands with the University of Florida/IFAS Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program to reach conservation-disconnected homeowners. Through this outreach effort, residents learn the importance of water conservation and "how to" water-wise landscaping and maintenance practices. For more information on the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program, go to <http://cfyn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

## ***PE TIP SHEET NO. 22***

### ***Florida yards & Neighborhoods – A Win-Win Situation***

***BY***

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Living among renowned rivers of song, thousands of bass-filled lakes, and in a state engulfed by world famous beaches, it's hard to convince people that Florida has water supply issues. Newcomers to the Sunshine State, and even native residents have trouble absorbing this simple fact: we are going to inevitably run out of cheap potable water and it may be sooner than we are prepared for. Impressing upon people the need to conserve water and change life-long perceptions and bad habits while they live on a beautiful lake with a lush lawn is not an easy job. Homeowners dream of ideal landscapes: their own garden paradise, thick carpet of dark, green lawn with no weeds, no insect problems, and no disease problems. Then faced with hectic schedules, busy lifestyles, and lack of motivation from un-ecofriendly homeowners, how can you capture the attention of someone who doesn't want to learn about water conservation?

How do you market an environmental educational program to consumers who no longer worry about drought or care about higher water bills or non-source water pollution and the environment and don't have the time or interest to attend landscape workshops? You educate by going to where they shop and appealing to the three most important questions that anyone asks when hearing a sales spiel:

- a) Will it save me money?
- b) Will it save me time?
- c) Will I have a better product?

The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods answers all three of those questions with common sense principles, latest university research studies, and altering inaccurate perceptions stemming from years of misguided efforts based on misinformation.

Educating disinterested residents is a task that municipalities and water suppliers face. The University of Florida/IFAS Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program working with the City of Sanford Utility department, Ace Hardware and Lowe's stores, has found a successful outlet for not only capturing homeowners who don't know they need conservation information, or wanted the information, but didn't have time to sit in workshops: Have a Water Wise Event at the 'do-it-yourself' stores. Go to where the homeowner can multi-task while shopping, and while in the mood to purchase plants and work outside, educate them.

The City of Sanford in compliance with their education portion of their Consumptive Use Permit and NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Emission Systems), works with Florida Yards & Neighborhoods to educate water users on the nine FYN principles encompassing every aspect of landscaping from the initial design phase to finished product with an underlying focus on water conservation and non-source water pollution. They are: right plant, right place; water efficiently; mulching correctly; recycling; fertilizing appropriately; managing yard pests responsibly; attracting wildlife; reducing stormwater runoff; and the responsibility of living on the water.

These principles were absorbed easily at Spring Water Wise events in Ace Hardware store and Lowe's Garden Center, celebrating Earth Day and National Drinking Water Week, where local homeowners received expert fertilization and irrigation advice from participating landscape vendors such as Mister Landscaper, Scotts, Sunniland, Miracle-Gro, Spectrum, Round-Up, and Spectricide, receiving free samples, coupons and hand-outs. The 'weekend warrior' and new home landscapers received sound advice and educational material, on appropriate plant selection for their individual yards from Central Florida's FYN coordinator and water conservation expert Teresa Watkins. Residents were able to recycle their old high flow showerhead for a free low-flow showerhead and learned other water saving fixtures and strategies with the City of Sanford Utility department employees Marisol Ordonez, Nancy Jermyn and Bill Marcous.



Teresa Watkins, right, helps a customer select the appropriate plants for her landscape during one of Sanford's Spring Water Wise Events.

Frequently, much to their surprise, homeowners are amazed at the insight that the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods principles provides them and are delighted with their newfound knowledge. While they come for purchasing plants for their yards or taking care of their demanding weeds, learning how to take care of their lawn, weeds, and insect problems, they essentially realize that by watering less, fertilizing appropriately and applying chemicals only as needed, they will have a healthier lawn.

Understanding their impact of the their own yard maintenance, the newly educated homeowner becomes a willing shareholder in seeing their part in the cause and effect of their own high consumption of water and non-source water pollution, not as a helpless victim of seemingly unreasonable water bills and dying landscapes. Creating a sense of pride and stewardship about our state and its precious and fragile resources, Florida Yards & Neighborhoods infuses shoppers who were unaware of the right thing to do in their landscapes with attractive, healthy, and easier maintained landscapes. Since the City of Sanford and Florida Yards & Neighborhoods starting holding these Water Wise events in 2003, over 500 people have become believers in Florida-friendly practices.

The City of Sanford Utilities in partnership with the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program, and regional landscape retail vendors, in local garden centers such as Lowe's and Ace Hardware educates homeowners about water conservation and non-source water pollution. It's a win-win situation for the water utilities, creating good will among its customers by showing concern and encouragement for homeowner's issues. It encourages more cross-merchandising sales and satisfied customers for the landscape retail vendors and the garden centers by promoting more efficient landscapes and better management practices. The Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program benefits the homeowner because of the fortunate coincidence that three important individual short-term goals of saving time, money, and having healthier landscapes, ultimately yields a very imperative universal long-range goal: the preservation of Florida's potable water supply.

*Water conservation expert Teresa Watkins is the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods coordinator for Central Florida. For more information on the sponsors and the Florida Yards & neighborhoods Program, visit the following Web site: <http://cfyn.ifas.ufl.edu>*

*You can download a reprint of this and other PE Tip Sheets from the FWEA web site at <http://fwea.cnsusa.com/cms/index.cfm?primarykeylist=,234,248,266,1669,1675>*