

# Florida-Friendly Case Study

## Willowbend

Sarasota County

Willowbend in Osprey, Fla., is the first development to incorporate Florida-friendly landscaping throughout the community. In deciding to develop Willowbend, which is a few miles south of downtown Sarasota, Lee Wetherington Companies paid special attention to its unique location abutting Oscar Scherer State Park, a recognized habitat for the threatened Florida scrub jay.

“We wanted to build a community that would embrace the Park as its neighbor. To do that, we called in experts from the Park as well as landscapers who work with Florida native plants,” says Lee Wetherington, president and founder. “We chose a color palette for the buildings and rooftops that would be in harmony with the environment and respectful of the creatures living next door. We also decided that landscaping would be developed on a community-wide rather than house-by-house basis. Each homeowner was allowed to choose individual plants from our list of Florida native plants. To cut down on the amount of water required for irrigation, we installed a drip



irrigation system and also regulated what plants could be placed under overhanging eaves. We also placed native plants around lakes to avoid fertilizer runoff.”

Wetherington says his sales staff was key in presenting the plan to potential buyers. “Our associates explained

our approach to Willowbend from the very beginning, so our homeowners were those who bought into the concept. That eased the process when we worked jointly to draw up community rules and regulations.”

The community regulations stipulate that “Willowbend was developed as a ‘Florida Yards’ community, and as such, the landscaping palette initially selected by the developer shall continue to be utilized in selecting plant material that is consistent with Florida Yards guidelines, unless otherwise approved by the board.”

There were some challenges in the beginning phases of this development. For instance, the initial landscape plan included waterfront grasses which grew to be 8 feet tall and obstructed the views to the water. The developer remained committed to maintaining a Florida-friendly community and worked with the FYN Builder and Developer Coordinator to identify solutions which would satisfy the residents concerns within the Florida-friendly principles.



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## Connerton

Pasco County

Connerton is an innovative “New Town” community with large preserved areas and a traditional neighborhood design on nearly 7,000 acres. Developed by Terrabrook, the community will include a Town Center, a regional park, and a mixed-use Village Center in each of the four proposed Villages as well as wildlife corridors and pedestrian trail systems. In addition, the developer sold 2,900 acres to the Southwest Water Management District for a wildlife preserve that will serve as a public recreational use area. The community is pursuing Florida Green Building Coalition certification for all of its new homes.



Connerton’s cutting edge technology to control limited water resource usage and maximize utilization of recycled wastewater is just one of many ways the community is Florida-friendly. The community has an ET controller to manage the irrigation use in common areas and the community currently draws irrigation water from two ponds that are maintained with reclaimed water. During heavy rain periods, the ponds will receive surplus reclaimed water from Pasco County Utilities, providing an important storage facility. To reduce stormwater runoff, Connerton includes brick pavers and pervious concrete along pedestrian paths, driveways, sidewalks and parking areas.



Connerton provides every new homeowner with an educational packet including information on Florida-friendly landscaping, stormwater and recycling. Every homeowner also signs a pledge to help protect nature and wildlife within their community

# The Hancock Place

## St. Johns County

The St. Johns Housing Partnership has developed a 7 acre, affordable housing community in St. Johns County which incorporates Florida-friendly principles into all aspects of the development while still maintaining an average cost for a single family home at \$150,000.

The Hancock Place incorporates low impact design elements such as roadside swales instead of curb and gutter. All of the yards are designed to exist on rainfall once established and homeowners are required to attend an introductory class on FYN before moving into their homes. The homeowner association's by-laws require that the community be maintained as Florida-friendly and has required the creation of a Landscape Committee to provide oversight.



The developer has created an ecologically enhanced stormwater detention pond that will include varied topography and a diversity of vegetation to provide habitat for birds and wildlife. The pond and swales will be monitored from students from Flagler College in cooperation with the St. Johns County Cooperative Extension Office and UF, Soil and Water Science Department.

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## River Forest

Manatee County

River Forest is a 20 acre community developed by Joe King in Manatee County. With 26 households, the developer intentionally incorporated a variety of low-impact development designs such as clustering, no curb and gutter and small depression basins into the design. These low-impact elements actually allowed the developer to increase the number of lots on the site.

The River Forest community began as a wooded site on the Braden River. Tree surveys were utilized for both the subdivision layout and for individual house placement. Habitat preservation and maintenance of natural hydrologic cycles were incorporated into the design. Deed restrictions and development guidelines were key to encouraging energy-efficient design and environmentally-friendly landscaping. Yards typically contained little to no mowed turf, irrigation systems or other high-maintenance items. Instead of concrete sidewalks, walking paths were created along the road with pine needles or crushed shell. The land was carefully cleared of invasives such as brazilian pepper and mulch was produced for use on the property.

FYN recognized River Forest with its first annual Florida-Friendly Community Award. The community was also featured on the 12-minute video *Developing a Better Way* which shows how Low-Impact Development designs can be incorporated into developments.



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## Pelican Preserve

Lee County

Pelican Preserve, a WCI community, is situated on just over 1,000 acres with more than 50% of it set aside for recreational and preserved areas including wetlands and natural wildlife corridors. The wetland preserve and boardwalk, which is located in the heart of the community, is not just a loop, but a pathway to get from one part of the community to the town square. Community representatives often lead potential new neighbors on tours along this boardwalk as part of their introduction to the community.



The community has made strong efforts to reduce water consumption in the landscape by installing a satellite controlled irrigation system and using stormwater primarily for irrigation. In response to recent water restrictions, Pelican Preserve has reduced the golf course irrigation by 30% and the average household water consumption for irrigation is typically very low at 650 - 714 gal/mo/household. The community participates in a voluntary water quality monitoring program which they began in Feb 2002 as part of their certification by Audubon International.



One of the most impressive characteristics of Pelican Preserve is the participation by both employees and the residents in making their community more Florida-friendly. Many WCI employees have attended FYN

training and have led nature walks and bird watching tours. Residents have equally embraced their environment by creating and maintaining a butterfly garden with educational information provided to visitors.



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## Longleaf Pasco County

The Longleaf community is situated on just under 600 acres in Pasco County with 40% of it set aside for common recreational and preserved areas. Using traditional neighborhood design elements, the 1600 units are clustered with small lots, minimum road widths, bike paths connecting the neighborhoods and a small commercial area. The first developers Frank and Trey Starkey voluntarily adopted Florida-friendly landscape designs in 2002 and the current developer Crosland has continued to build on this initial vision.



Parks include soil moisture sensors to reduce the community's overall irrigation usage and reclaimed water is used for irrigation. In February of this year, the community amended its covenants to include green building elements such as encouraging the selection of drought-tolerant grass and plants that may reduce or eliminate the need for permanent irrigation. To further educate its homeowners about environmental options, the community has installed "Green Living" educational kiosks.

Longleaf is one of only nine developments who have received FGBC's prestigious Green Development certification in the state. Pasco County's Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Builder and Developer Coordinator Chris Dewey praises Longleaf "for having served as a forward thinking model which was Florida-friendly before Green became a household word."

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### Contact

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# Florida-Friendly Case Study

## Lakes of Mount Dora

Mount Dora, Lake County

Pringle Development is incorporating Florida-friendly landscaping into their new community Lakes of Mount Dora in Lake County. Lakes of Mount Dora is on 546 acres and will include 950 units with an average home cost of \$330,000. The community has 300 acres (55%) considered common recreational area and 19 acres (3.5%) are preserved. Approximately 172 acres consist of man-made waterways.



Zoysia turf is required throughout the community and Florida-friendly landscaping is required and mandated in the community covenants, codes and restrictions (CCRs) under the Mount Dora Department of Planning and Development. The community uses reclaimed water and stormwater for irrigation and the Community POA conducts water quality monitoring of stormwater and irrigation supply system.

The irrigation system of both common areas and residential lots is centrally located and master managed with weather stations on site. The association hired a full-time irrigation technician to maintain and adjust irrigation systems.

The community website has a Florida-Friendly section ([pringle.com/green](http://pringle.com/green)) and is producing an educational video promoting Florida-Friendly landscaping for homeowners. In addition, all homebuyers are provided with a copy of the FYN Handbook. The development was featured on PRWeb.com and received a recognition certificate as part of the 2007 Outstanding Florida-Friendly Community Awards program.

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## Lakewood Ranch

Manatee and Sarasota Counties

Lakewood Ranch is a 28,000 acre residential and commercial development primarily in Manatee County (with a small portion in Sarasota County). There are 20 different builders working in the development and construction is planned through 2035.

The initial phase of Lakewood Ranch was traditional development design without application of FYN principles. A few years ago (can we say what year?), the Manatee County FYN agent started a conversation with the Lakewood Ranch developer about Florida Friendly landscaping. At the same time, a nearby development, Willowbend, was incorporating Florida Friendly landscaping as a standard design for the community. This role model provided the impetus for Lakewood Ranch developer to voluntarily adopt the Florida Green Building Coalition standards for all new construction. These standards include landscaping requirements comparable with FYN certification.

Sarasota County has Water-Efficient Landscaping Regulations which require specific design elements of the irrigation system. Sarasota County also has a voluntary Green Building Resolution which provides incentives such as fast track permitting and reduced permitting fees to the developer. Much of the Lakewood Ranch development, however, is in Manatee County which has neither a landscaping ordinance nor green building program in place.

To help the developer achieve the FGBC standards, the FYN agent conducted training in Florida friendly landscaping to the builders, landscape architects and



landscapers. As part of the education program, the FYN agent designed a demonstration site at the Lakewood Ranch Information Center to display the variety of ways to implement a Florida Friendly Yard. For instance, the demonstration garden

includes four types of porous surfaces for walking paths such as crushed shell and paver stones. An electronic information kiosk is also in place in the Welcome Center for prospective homeowners to use. FYN provides ongoing support through homeowner education and support for homeowner associations.

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## Mediterra

Lee County

Mediterra, developed by Bonita Bay Group is a 1,697 acre high end community with 950 units (between \$600,000 and \$7 million). The community was designed with 650 acres (38%) of common recreational area and 350 acres (20%) of preserved area. The community has 2 golf courses including the first 36-hole course to achieve Audubon International's Silver Signature Sanctuary status. Approximately 66% of the landscapes are Florida friendly and the approved plant list contains approximately 67% native and Florida-friendly plant species with a minimum of 50% native plants in the landscape design.

The construction process was carefully planned to be very low-impact. The site plan preserves native trees without disturbance to drip line, no fill is to be placed on roots, and saw palmettos are retained at base of pines. The development also requires stemwall construction to preserve existing vegetation and relocates native specimen trees instead of replacing them when possible. Nearly 100% of vegetation that was cleared on site was converted to mulch and an estimated 8,000 cubic yards of soil was recovered through on-site grinding and screening and used as topsoil in community. All builders have completed the "Build Green and Profit" program from the Program for Resource Efficient Communities.

About 220 acres of turf is irrigation with TORA Site Pro irrigation system and the developer is considering pilot testing new satellite-control irrigation technology for future residents. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is used throughout the community and all fertilizers used are slow-release. All of the common areas are FYN certified.



The community has contracted with an ornithologist to monitor bird populations and lead bird watching walks and they have voluntarily participated in studies and environmental education programs. Educational materials are provided at all levels from employees and supervisors to contractors and homeowners. Lastly, money is set aside within HOA documents for educational programs related to the natural environment.

# Florida-Friendly Case Study

## Madera

City of Gainesville

Developed by Greentrust LLC, Madera is a 44 acre community in the city of Gainesville. Madera will eventually include 88 energy-efficient single family homes that are clustered to allow for pockets of natural areas to allow for natural storm water detention. A number of low-impact design elements were included in the community including no curb and gutter, limited clearing the lots, vegetative buffer strips were left between houses, and small depressions in the landscape to collect stormwater. The community also has interpretive kiosks created by UF Wildlife ecologists highlighting water conservation practices.



The model home in this development was the first house to follow the new Green Building Program of the city. This energy efficient home achieves a “zero stormwater discharge” by using a combination of techniques including



a soil moisture sensor to increase the efficiency of the irrigation system, inclusion of rain gardens, porous pavers for parking or walkways, and an underground infiltration tank.

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## North Point at Ironwood

Alachua County

North Point at Ironwood is an 18 acre mixed income community developed by the Neighborhood Housing & Development Corporation in Alachua County. 92% of the residents are first-time homeowners. Home landscapes feature all bahia grass and no in-ground irrigation as all of the landscapes are watered for establishment only. Homeowners receive a welcome letter introducing them to their new landscape, a Gardening 101 booklet and post-purchasing counseling on energy efficiency and landscape maintenance.



The community includes 3 acres of preserved area as well as naturally vegetated swales to collect and convey road runoff. The homes have been certified by the Florida Green Building Coalition and Energy Star.

Alachua County Horticulture Agent, Wendy Wilber says, "I am so pleased to drive people through the North Point neighborhood to show them that



landscapes can be created to exist quite well on rainfall alone and supplemental hand watering during drought conditions. North Point landscapes are helping to demonstrate what Florida-friendly looks like and that you don't have to spend a lot of money to have a good looking landscape."

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## On Top of the World Communities

Marion County

The On Top of the World Community has worked closely with Marion County's Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Coordinator, Kathleen Patterson for many years on incorporating Florida-friendly landscaping into its home and common landscapes. The community features clustered homes as well as the Circle Square Commons, a commercial and cultural hub which hosts a weekly farmer's market.

The FYN Coordinator has certified a number of neighborhoods in the past and has been working to certify the two newest neighborhoods. The community received a SWFWMD Water Recognition Award. The strong education program includes presentations on the community website, articles in monthly newsletters as well as up to four monthly educational workshops on water conservation and Florida-friendly landscaping.



On Top of the World builds its homes to Energy Star standards and the homes in its newest neighborhood, Renaissance Park, are built to meet the requirements for the Florida Water Star<sup>SM</sup> certification.



# Homeowners association receives Florida-friendly landscaping help and makes an impact

Members of the Venetian Bay Homeowners Association (HOA) wanted to do their part to conserve water so they looked to the City of St. Petersburg and the Pinellas County Extension office for help.

The Venetian Bay community consists of 22 waterfront and 51 nonwaterfront townhomes in St. Petersburg. In August 2006, Sara Lopez, an HOA board member and secretary, asked for assistance from the city's water conservation program because the community was using an average of 460,000 gallons of water per month for irrigation.

The excess water use led to skyrocketing water bills. One month's bill reached a record \$10,000!

The HOA contacted Chris Claus, a water conservation coordinator with the St. Petersburg Water Resources Department, because reclaimed water was unavailable in the area and the community's proximity to the coast caused surficial irrigation wells to be too salty.

Claus visited Venetian Bay to evaluate the community's landscape and determine where the HOA could conserve water.

Through the city's Sensible Sprinkling Program, the HOA received a sprinkler system evaluation that provided zone-by-zone efficiency reports for each controller. Sponsored by the City of St. Petersburg and the District's Pinellas-Anclote River Basin Board, the evaluation was provided at no cost.

Claus then linked the HOA board to Doris Heitzmann, a horticulturist and community outreach coordinator with the Pinellas County Extension office.

"I knew that a cooperative effort between the city and the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program could provide the resources necessary to guide this community in developing a long-range strategy that saves water while maintaining an attractive and functional landscape," said Claus.

The District works in conjunction with the county Extension offices and the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences' Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program to promote Florida-friendly landscaping practices.

Heitzmann recommended implementing Florida-friendly landscaping practices such as adding mulch to plant areas, using drought-tolerant plants and replacing high-water use annuals with colorful, drought-tolerant ornamental plants.

"What made this project special was working with the city, which provided measured water-savings statistics," said Heitzmann. "I work with communities every day and while you do see results, they are not as tangible as seeing the concrete numbers provided by the water audit."

Once many of the water efficiency and landscape recommendations were implemented, the results were dramatic. From July 2006 to July 2007, the HOA recognized an average monthly savings of almost 200,000 gallons, and much lower water bills. During that time, approximately 2.4 million gallons of potable water were conserved, which is a 45 percent water savings. The appearance and health of the lawn and landscape improved as well.

“Not only have we conserved precious water and saved money for the residents by adopting Florida-friendly landscaping, but we also have achieved notable results in design and management,” said Lopez.

In addition to helping the HOA conserve water, Heitzmann and Claus also worked with an HOA representative to create lawn, landscape and irrigation maintenance specifications to assist the community in finding a new landscaping prime contractor who could meet all their needs. Securing a prime contractor to oversee each subcontractor performing maintenance, pest and weed control and irrigation services eliminated the “finger pointing” between contractors.

“It was impressive to experience firsthand the synergy and great alignment between the city and the Extension office to provide tangible support to those interested in creating efficient and beautiful landscapes,” said Lopez.

Homeowners associations interested in reducing water use and learning about Florida-friendly landscaping practices can visit the District’s web site at [www.WaterMatters.org/yards/](http://www.WaterMatters.org/yards/). There is also a link at the bottom of the page to access the phone numbers for each county Extension office within the District. In addition, many water utilities provide water conservation personnel and publications to provide assistance.

