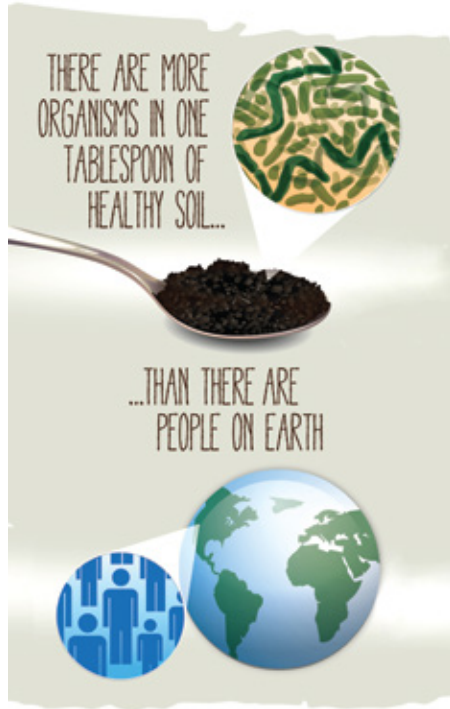




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In *honor* of **National Lawn & Garden Month** we have put a spotlight on: **Nurturing Nature's Canvas**



## Restoring Eden

Water conservation is no longer just a buzzword. It is an essential practice that is becoming increasingly important in all aspects of life. Plants grown in sandy soil need to be watered more often. Developing an effective drought management strategy is going to be key to maintain a thriving landscape. The answer is simple and lies beneath our feet – in the health of our soil. Soil forms the foundation for our plants and acts as the moderator in the relationship between the Earth and water.

### Building Soil Health

We need to add something to our sandbox that will hold both water and nutrients and create a suitable environment for beneficial soil organisms. That "something" is organic matter. A shift in mindset is necessary; soil management must become a budget priority to sustain our landscapes.

### Soil's Influence on Plant Ecology

In ecology, functional communities are defined as a series of balanced systems, each one performing cyclically without human intervention. Many of our landscapes aren't functional communities and cannot thrive without constant input. We need to rethink that approach and bring ecological function back into our landscapes. This will not only help the environment, but it will also create landscapes needing less maintenance.

### Integrating Soil Management into Budgets

Historically, soil management may not have been a line item in landscape budgets. However, the paradigm is shifting. A forward-thinking approach focuses on cultivating a resilient landscape that can endure fluctuating weather patterns without exhausting resources.

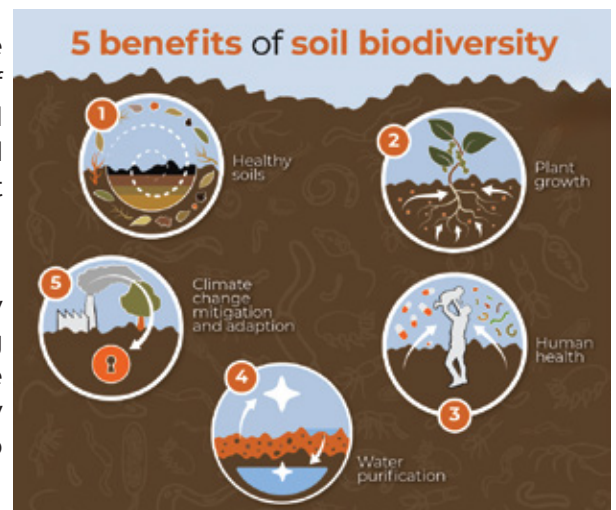
### The Interplay of Soil Quality and Water Conservation

An integral part of water conservation is soil quality. Good soil structure allows water to infiltrate, minimizing runoff and creating a reservoir of moisture that plants can draw upon. In contrast, compacted, sandy soil impedes water infiltration and retention, leading to wasteful runoff and inadequate water supply for plants during dry spells. Therefore, soil must possess the ability to welcome and hold water effectively.

### Proactive Solutions and Water Restrictions

With water restrictions becoming more prevalent, it is increasingly necessary to employ proactive solutions to combat these limitations. Incorporating amendments and techniques that conserve water is not just a response measure; it's a smart way to empower your landscape to face water scarcity head-on. Investing in soil health and adjusting management practices are no longer luxuries but necessities in water conservation.

**Learn about COMAND, a proactive soil solution, on page 6.**



# How “Green” is Your Community

As more people move to Florida daily, continued land development is inevitable. Floridians must find a way to coexist with their natural environment or face losing valuable resources such as pristine waters and native species. To protect Florida's fragile environment, developers, homeowners, and homeowner associations must understand and address the environmental impact of their land use decisions and make a positive difference in preserving Florida's natural resources.

Embarking on a journey toward greener, more eco-conscious living can pay many dividends in a community. Green communities translate into lower operating costs while providing beneficial lower environmental impact for the community. Get involved as a community to develop a master plan and make a difference for a better tomorrow. Encouraging residents to be part of the eco-adventure can transform and enhance the community over time.



## Little by Little Ideas

**Cultivate** leadership and environmental stewardship

**Create** an Environmental Education Committee

**Learn** how to Identify Invasive plants

**Implement** Community Green Guidelines

**Develop** a resilience master plan to identify locations for implementing nature based solutions to mitigate flooding and erosion, improve resiliency, protect habitat, and increase recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

**Inventory** of open space and community park plans to identify needs related to impacts of water usage.

**Develop** guidance for infrastructure upgrades to follow Florida-friendly design standards.

**Integrate** an Adaptive Management Approach to

- 1 Foster** the implementation of improved soil moisture management practices,
- 2 Support** ecosystem function and healthy watersheds, and
- 3 Prioritize** the preservation, restoration, and expansion of natural features such as habitat, open space, wetlands, and vegetated buffers to increase the resilience of natural systems.

**Establish** a Community Garden Program to convert vacant lots or other available space to community gardens.

**Promote** water conservation, reuse, and best management practices with a plan to respond to current changes and capitalize on the community's potential.

**Engage** community to meet Florida Water Star criteria and  
**Obtain** Florida Water Star Residential Certification.

**Replace** or rehabilitate water and wastewater pipes to maintain a state of good repair and ensure structural integrity.

**Install** dog stations for poo disposal.

**Strengthen** stormwater management capacity by installing native plant and animal species to green infrastructure systems.

**Retrofit** dry ponds to natural ecosystems while still providing necessary flood protection.

**Introduce** native plants and animals to retention ponds and turn them into healthy ecosystems so they can clean and restore themselves.





**Starkey**  
RANCH

# Embracing Green Living

Starkey Ranch is a beacon of ecological harmony and innovation, setting a new standard for sustainable living. Every feature, from comprehensive water conservation measures to the thoughtful selection of native plant life, is designed to foster a community that values environmental stewardship as much as comfort and style. More than a residential haven, it's a testament to their commitment to preserving and enhancing natural habitats while offering unmatched living experiences.

Their landscaping philosophy aims for a seamless integration with the neighboring Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Preserve. Our recent installation along Rangeland Boulevard continued this vision, where over 15,000 "Florida-Friendly" plants now thrive, inviting wildlife and residents to engage in an immersive natural experience. This carefully curated selection includes native species such as Ecoturf Perennial Peanut, American Beautyberry, Sabal minor palmetto, Native Firebush, Yaupon Holly, Pink Muhly, Fakahatchee, and Cord grass—each chosen for their ability to enhance the local ecosystem and encourage biodiversity.

Starkey Ranch represents more than just a community; it epitomizes that development and nature can thrive side by side. It's a testament to the fact that living spaces can be designed to honor the earth, conserve resources, and provide a healthy, vibrant environment for all inhabitants.



## A Sunny Delight: **Ecoturf Perennial Peanut**

*Florida's hot summers and sandy soils can challenge some plants, but not this peanut!*

Eco-Turf Perennial peanut is a prostrate (flat, ground-hugging) growing, drought-tolerant, cold-hardy plant resistant to diseases, insects, and nematodes. Prefers full sun to light shade, is salt tolerant, and requires little to no mowing. Additionally, it is pest and disease-resistant, fixes nitrogen to support its growth, produces abundant flowers, and has high aesthetic value as an ornamental ground cover. It flowers profusely in bright yellow to orange through the warm months, especially the dead of summer, and requires no irrigation after establishment.

*Starkey Ranch Ecoturf Perennial Peanut, left to right: new installation, getting the water it needs to for proper establishment, an original install to the community at a roundabout on Rangeland, perennial peanut in bloom.*

# Plant This, Not That: Choosing Florida-Friendly Over Invasive Species

We work in harmony with nature instead of against it. Florida allows for a huge variety of plants to thrive. But some of the plants that are common to our home landscapes are actually invasive species, and many are now widespread in Florida's natural areas.

We can start by choosing plants that don't get too large for their space, which can prevent excess pruning and yard waste. Next, we can find some plants that can survive with less water if we have a dry yard. If we have an area that floods, some plants can tolerate that.



## What is an Invasive Non-Native Plant?

An invasive non-native plant species is an introduced species shown to displace the native vegetation by out-competing native species. Without the factors that generally keep them under control in their native homes, invasive vegetation species overwhelm and displace existing vegetation to form dense, single-species stands that dominate and displace the natural community.

## Prevent the Spread of Invasive Non-Native Plants

By choosing to plant a garden with native plants, you will prevent the spread of invasive plants from your yard to other natural areas. At the same time, you conserve water, energy, time, and money and reduce or eliminate the need for harmful pesticides and herbicides. There is a wide variety of native plants to choose from when creating the Florida yard that is the most pleasing to you.

## Why Should You Care?

Once invasive plants take over our native plants, the result is:

- Florida's natural biodiversity is destroyed.
- Our native plants can eventually become permanently eliminated.
- The animals that use those native plants cannot use non-native ones.
- Aquatic invasive plants can harm fish habitats.
- It costs billions of dollars to eradicate.

To succeed, non-native grasses and plants require a lot of water, fertilizers, pesticides, and chemicals, degrading water quality, affecting water supplies, and hurting beneficial insects such as pollinators.

April showers bring May flowers, so start your Florida-friendly garden this month and reap the benefits of what you sow in May and beyond! You will contribute to our efforts to conserve water, protect our natural resources and create an environment for butterflies, birds and other wildlife to thrive.

### INVASIVE

### FLORIDA FRIENDLY



Creeping oxeye



Dune sunflower



Oblongleaf twinflower



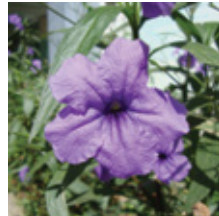
Lantana



Coastal mock vervain



Firebush



Britton's wild petunia



Spotted Beebalm



Wild petunia



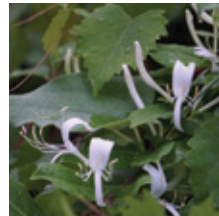
Tuberous sword fern



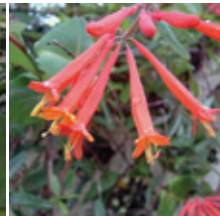
Wood fern



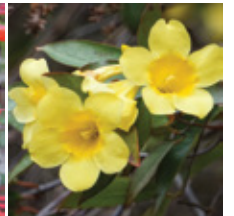
Coontie



Japanese honeysuckle



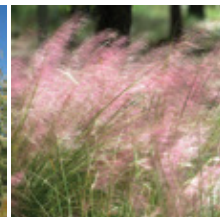
Coral honeysuckle



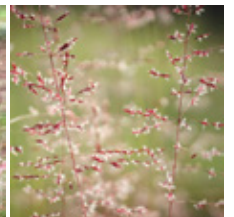
Carolina jessamine



Napiergrass



Muhlygrass



Pineywoods dropseed



Climbing cassia



Privet senna



Marlberry

# Living with Alligators is a Florida Reality

Living in Florida, we must share our space with a giant reptile, the American alligator. Because of Florida's booming population growth, people and alligators are forced to cross paths, increasing the chances of conflict. Knowing where alligators live, how they behave, and what you can do to avoid conflict with alligators is key to sharing space safely.

Alligators may occur anywhere there is water—lakes, ponds, rivers, marshes, swamps, and even man-made canals. Alligators also create and maintain important habitats for numerous other species. Their nesting sites provide shelter for birds and small mammals, while their burrows offer refuge for aquatic animals during dry periods. Additionally, alligators' wallows and scrapes inadvertently help create diverse wetland ecosystems, influencing vegetation growth and providing ideal breeding grounds for many species.

## What do Alligators Eat?

Alligators primarily hunt at dusk or during the night. They lie motionless in wait for prey. An alligator's diet depends on what is available to it, which means it will eat just about anything, including fish, frogs, birds, turtles, insects, snakes, small mammals, other alligators, white-tailed deer, wild hogs, and sometimes people's pets. Once the prey is caught, it is typically swallowed whole. Alligators have tremendously powerful jaws that can crush turtle shells and the bones of small mammals. A flap in their throat allows alligators to capture prey underwater without water entering their breathing passages.

Do not allow dogs to swim or explore waters known to have alligators because dogs look like prey to alligators. There are far more alligator attacks on dogs than on humans.

## How do Alligators Move

Alligators have extensive shoulder, pelvis, and spine modifications that enable them to swim and walk on land. In water, alligators propel themselves by moving their muscular tail from side to side.

When on land, they can move quickly and run at speeds of 7.5 to 9 mph for short distances. Their sharp claws and powerful tails help make for agile climbing over low fencing.

## The Alligators Nest

Female alligators construct nests by mounding up vegetation, sticks, leaves, and mud in a sheltered spot in or near water. After completing the nest, the female will deposit her eggs (ranging between 20 and 50 eggs) at once and cover them up with more vegetation for incubation. Females stay near the nest during incubation and actively defend it from predators like raccoons. Females may also be aggressive toward humans, often hissing and charging at intruders, so alligator nests should never be approached.

## Why it is Illegal to Feed Alligators

The key to staying safe is being alert to the possibility of alligators being present and never feeding them.

When humans feed alligators, it causes the alligators to lose their natural fear of humans and to associate humans with food. It doesn't matter if people feed them human food or throw them fish guts when cleaning fish; it's all bad. It changes the alligator's behavior.

Alligators fed by humans are dangerous and should be reported to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-866-FWC-GATOR.



Alligator sunbathing on the lawn near the pond.  
below: Mother Alligator guarding her nest.



American alligator hatchlings. Hatchlings emerge from their eggs in August and September in Florida and often stay near the nest site for a couple of years.



# A Proactive Solution to Combat Water Restrictions



# COMAND®



COMAND® is an excellent solution to deal with watering restrictions and sandy soil. Typically, compost and soil would not be considered a cost reduction variable, but when you can only water once a week, it could save you from replacing plants and turf.

COMAND® is a bioengineered yet completely natural product designed as a one-of-kind **specialty top dressing**. COMAND® is produced using a proprietary blend of enzyme-producing microbes. Utilizing unique composting methodology and innovative techniques, microorganisms are maximized for soil and turf health.

## COMAND® is a Game Changer

Improves soil structure & porosity to create a better root environment.

Improves water holding to provide greater drought resistance & water utilization.

Increases infiltration & permeability, allowing nutrients to better percolate into the soil.

Increases cation-exchange capacity (CEC), improving soil's ability to hold nutrients.

It improves wear tolerance, allowing your grass to handle heavy traffic & use.

Replenishes & restores the activity of beneficial soil microbes.

Encourages natural biological suppression of diseases & other turf enemies.

PEOPLE & PET SAFE



EASY TO APPLY



REDUCES THATCH



HARVEST QUEST BIO-TECHNOLOGY



COMAND® is naturally produced through the controlled aerobic, biological decomposition of biodegradable materials. No chemicals or synthetic nutrients are added. The product has undergone thermophilic temperatures, which destroy pathogens and weed seeds and stabilize the carbon, which is highly beneficial to plant growth.

Proven, certified and supported through numerous industry and academic partnerships.



US Composting Council®



DELIVERS  
BIOLOGICAL POWER



RESTORES  
SOIL STRUCTURE



ENVIRONMENTALLY  
FRIENDLY



OPTIMIZES  
WATER USAGE



NATURAL  
DISEASE SUPPRESSANT



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