

# On Our Pond



Quarterly Newsletter Published By: Hillsborough County Environmental Services Division

# Adopt-A-Pond Plant Spotlight

Pages 4/5

April & May: Florida's Dry Season is Here - Time to Adjust Your Watering Habits!



As Hillsborough County enters April and May, Florida's peak dry season is officially underway.

### **Invasive vs Non-Native**



What is the difference between invasive vegetation and non-native vegetation?

3

# Hillsborough County Photo Contest



We're holding a photo contest to submit photos taken around stormwater ponds! Submit your best photo for a chance to be featured in an upcoming newsletter!



# April & May: Florida's Dry Season is Here - Time to Adjust Your Watering Habits!

As Hillsborough County enters April and May, Florida's peak dry season is officially underway. With rainfall at its lowest, it's more important than ever to use water wisely—especially when it comes to outdoor irrigation. During these months, your lawn may require less water than you think. And with potential changes to watering schedules -- such as going from two days a week to just one -- now is the perfect time to reassess your watering practices.

### Stay up-to-date on your watering schedule:

Check your assigned watering days and times by visiting Hillsborough County's Watering Schedule Tool.

## 5 Tips for Making Your Lawn More Drought-Tolerant:

1. Contact Your UF/IFAS Extension Office for Florida-Friendly Landscaping<sup>™</sup> Guidance Your local Extension Office offers expert advice on choosing the right plants, turf types, and landscaping techniques that thrive in Florida's climate while conserving water.

### 2. Check for Leaks in Your Irrigation System

A single broken sprinkler head or underground leak can waste hundreds of gallons of water a week. Regularly inspect and test your irrigation system to ensure the water is going exactly where it's needed.

### 3. Water Deeply, Not Frequently

Instead of shallow, frequent watering, aim for deep irrigation once a week. This encourages your grass to develop deeper roots, making it more resilient to drought. The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) recommends applying ½ to ¾ inch of water per irrigation session to maintain a healthy lawn in Florida. The duration required to deliver this amount varies based on your irrigation system's output. To determine the exact time needed, you can perform a simple



test: <u>Ask IFAS - Powered by EDIS+2Ask IFAS - Powered by EDIS+2Ask IFAS - Powered by</u> <u>EDIS+2</u>

- Place small, straight-sided containers (like tuna cans) at various points within your sprinkler's coverage area.
- Run your irrigation system for 15 minutes.
- Measure the amount of water collected in each container.

If, for example, you collect ¼ inch of water in 15 minutes, it would take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to apply the

recommended 1/2 to 3/4 inch. This method helps ensure uniform application and prevents over- or under-watering.

For personalized advice tailored to your specific lawn and soil conditions in Hillsborough County, consider reaching out to the local UF/IFAS Extension Office. They offer resources and services, such as irrigation evaluations, to assist residents in optimizing their lawn care practices.

### 4. Use Mulch in Plant Beds

Mulching reduces water loss, suppresses weeds, and helps keep soil temperatures stable. It's a simple and effective way to retain moisture where plants need it most.

### 5. Install a Rain Sensor or Smart Controller

Make sure your irrigation system isn't running when it doesn't need to. Rain sensors or smart irrigation controllers can automatically delay watering after rainfall, preventing waste and saving water.

By making these small changes, you'll not only protect your lawn through the dry season—you'll also be doing your part to conserve Florida's precious water resources. Water for about 30 to 45 minutes per zone, depending on your sprinkler system and soil type, to ensure water reaches 6 – 8 inches deep into the soil where roots grow best.



# **Invasive vs Non-Native**

When talking about vegetation, specifically aquatic vegetation around a stormwater pond, a common question comes up: What is the difference between invasive vegetation and non-native vegetation? To better understand the question, let's look at two plants commonly seen around stormwater ponds: torpedograss and sweet flag. In this situation, torpedograss is an invasive species and sweet flag is a non-native species.

Torpedograss was introduced to the United States in the late 19th century but was officially imported and distributed by the United States Department of Agriculture in the early 20th century. In today's world, torpedograss is now considered one of the most troublesome invasive grasses in Florida, found in over 70% of the state's public waters. So, what happened? Once torpedograss was distributed, it quickly started taking over landscapes and choking out native species. It was easily spread by mowers, traveled to new places on heavy equipment and boats, and the situation quickly got out of hand. The grass spreads easily by rhizomes and stem fragments, which can form new plants and grow dense mats that can impede water flow or restrict use of the shoreline. In simpler terms, torpedograss is invasive because it has high potential to harm the environment. In fact, more than a third of all endangered and threatened plant and animal species are declining because of invasive species. It also damages the economy and human health. Torpedograss management costs approximately \$2 million a year in flood control systems. An invasive species will never be a native species.

Now let's talk about non-native species. Sweet flag is considered a non-native plant in Florida because it was introduced to the geographic region after European contact. While the term "non-native" usually refers to plants from other countries or continents, it can also refer to plants from another region within the same country. According to the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, approximately 1,400 of Florida's plants are non-native in their origin. However, non-native doesn't always mean bad. Of the 857 plants evaluated by the UF/IFAS Assessment, 73% are actually recommended by gardeners for use in Florida landscapes. Of the remaining 27%, 15% are "caution plants," 7% are invasive, and 5% are prohibited. Sweet flag is recommended in tough garden spots such as narrow spaces because they make good accent plants among other short annual or perennial species, and they don't outcompete native plants.

So, remember, all invasive plants are non-native, but not all non-native plants are invasive!



Torpedograss starting to grow around the edge of a pond in the water.



A patch of sweet flag can be seen above. The picture to the right shows a darker patch of sweet flag near the edge of a stormwater pond.



# **Storm Drain Marking Program**



Did you know that Hillsborough County provides storm drain markers to residents for free? Storm drain markers are placed on curb inlets as reminders that storm drains are only for rain - not oil, grass clippings, leaves, fertilizers, trash, or pet waste! Kits can be requested and include storm drain markers, glue, and door hangers to let everyone in the neighborhood know about the markers and the message they carry. Go to <u>https://hillsborough.wateratlas.usf.edu/adopt-a-pond/storm-drain-marking-kit.aspx</u> and fill out the requested information for your storm drain marking kit today!



# **Adopt-A-Pond Plant Spotlight**

After a pond receives approval for the Adopt-A-Pond Program, the next step is to choose which plants will be best suited for an initial planting. The Adopt-A-Pond Program offers a variety of emergent plants as well as grasses and trees, but ultimately what gets chosen is up to the pond group and the Adopt-A-Pond coordinator. All the options are native, many of them flower in order to create a pleasing landscape as well as attract pollinators, and none of them will grow aggressively. Below you will find some of the common plants Adopt-A-Pond provides that pond groups can choose from.



# Pickerelweed

This plant can grow to about 2 to 3 feet tall and flowers year-round. Pickerelweed is easily identified by its spike of violet-blue flowers which grow as many small individual flowers. In some rare cases, the flowers on pickerelweed can be white. This plant is often confused with common arrowhead but they can be distinguished by their leaf lobes. Pickerelweed has rounded lobes on its lance-shaped leaves while common arrowhead has pointed lobes on its arrow-shaped leaves.



# **Duck potato**

This plant has large leaves which are typically 4 inches wide and 2 feet long and easily identifiable by white flowers with three petals. The flowers are found on stalks that are taller than the leaves and the plant usually grows to about 4 feet tall.



# Golden Canna

This native aquatic plant typically grows to four 4 feet tall and is found in small stands at the edges of marshes, ponds, and lakes. The large, yellow flowers are easy to identify, and the leaves can be six 6 inches wide and two 2 feet long.





# Blue-flag iris

These native plants can grow up to four 4 feet tall and produce large blue/purple-like flowers which are easily identifiable. The leaves are narrow and swordlike and can grow up to two 2 and a half feet long.



# Spikerush

The stems of this plant grow up to four 4 feet tall and the stems are about a half-inch in diameter. This plant has no leaves, but it does have long sheaths at the stem base which are often tinged dark red. The spikelet is covered with brown, broadly rounded scales and has up to 140 small flowers.



# **Bald cypress**

Bald cypress is a very large tree commonly found growing in lakes, swamps, floodplains, and along streams. The leaves of this tree are linear, and spread on the branchlets, with branchlets spreading.





# **Hillsborough County Photo Contest**

Do you spend a lot of time around stormwater ponds in Hillsborough County? If so, we're holding a photo contest for residents to submit photos taken around stormwater ponds. Why stormwater ponds? Often seen as just reservoirs for stormwater, stormwater ponds are so much more! They provide nutrient reduction through submerged and emergent vegetation, they are habitats and food sources for all kinds of animals, and they can be beautiful spaces for people to enjoy. Submit your best photo to SaccoS@HCFL.gov for a chance to be featured in an upcoming Hillsborough County newsletter!







# How to Identify and Report an Illicit Discharge

Have you ever seen something other than stormwater entering a stream or lake, or witnessed somebody dumping something down a storm drain? Have you ever been concerned about sediment washing away from a construction site? Hillsborough County makes it easy to report illegal dumping or discharges. Here is a link to report discharges or dumping into waterbodies, curb inlets, or stormwater ponds: https://hillsborough.wateratlas.usf.edu/atlas-forms/ReportPollution.

To report illicit discharges, make sure to write down or note key information. Don't be brief; describe everything you know about the situation. It is essential to thoroughly describe the facts. Describe exactly where the problem occurred, including the address. Be specific about how much material you saw. Describe the people involved. Was the weather an important factor? What was the exact time and duration of the event? Listed below is a brief example of the information you will need to report:

- Date and time of incident
- Location of incident
- A description of the illegal activity witnessed
- Waterbody (optional)
- Photos (optional)
- Contact information (optional)

Examples of illicit discharges you can report!



Sediment tracking from a nearby construction site



Resident blowing yard debris down a storm drain