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#### **GUEST COLUMN**

Julia Burch and Nina Powers

#### **Landscaping For Climate Change - Making a Difference for Tomorrow**

Compact fluorescent lights and hybrid cars have become a part of the national conversation about some of the behavior changes that citizens can make to decrease their impact on climate change. But just imagine if there was a change that you could make today that would reduce your emissions footprint, save you money and time, reduce air and water pollution, enhance your home environment and help build our local green economy.

The good news is that solutions do already exist and *Landscaping for Climate Change (LCC)* is one of them. *LCC* is a collaborative effort of Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) and Sarasota County's Sustainable Sarasota and Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team (NEST). The program helps homeowners "connect the dots" to see the big picture of the relationship between climate change, pollution and landscaping. The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) recently highlighted the program as an example of a local solution to a global problem.

Landscaping practices have a huge impact on the environment. Conventional landscapes require energy-intensive, polluting and often expensive maintenance that can heighten the demand for irrigation, fertilizers, pesticides and frequent mowing. According to the Environmental Protection Agency a push mower emits as much pollution in an hour as 11 cars - a riding mower as much as 34 cars. The Department of Energy says that annual U.S. nitrous oxide emissions began rising sharply from 2003-2006 largely as a result of increases in the application of synthetic nitrogen fertilizers.

Climate-friendly landscaping practices not only reduce the demand for non-renewable resources but also improve our water and air quality. In Florida approximately 50 percent of total water use takes place outside the home. Climate-friendly landscaping practices reduce pollution, and conserve precious drinking water. Landscaping designed to eliminate or minimize demand on drinking water is always an important consideration, but especially during the extreme water shortage conditions we are experiencing in southwest Florida due to prolonged drought.

Climate-friendly landscaping is based on the following 10 guidelines:

1. Minimize the lawn - Lawns require carbon and nitrogen intensive maintenance. When you mow and hedge use electric or manual equipment.
2. Incorporate native plants - Native plants are adapted to local conditions and need less carbon and nitrogen intensive maintenance.
3. Reduce hardened surfaces - Driveways and sidewalks absorb and radiate heat, creating hot microclimates. They also increase stormwater runoff.
4. Conserve energy by conserving water - It takes energy to pump, filter and distribute water, so capture and reuse rainwater with rain barrels, cisterns, rain gardens and green roofs.
5. Minimize or eliminate fertilizer and pesticide use - Reduce emissions associated with the use of synthetic chemicals in your yard. Use natural alternatives.
6. Reuse yard waste - Recycle carbon and nitrogen back into the soil naturally
7. Increase tree canopy - Keep mature trees, and plant new trees to decrease your carbon footprint and provide shade.
8. Create biodiversity - Plants absorb more carbon and nitrogen than mowed lawns, and they benefit wildlife.
9. Naturalize the shoreline – Create low-maintenance landscape buffers along all shorelines, and use native vegetation instead of seawalls to buffer against storm surge and rising sea levels.
10. Engage your neighborhood - One person can make a difference, but more people can make an even bigger difference!

Landscaping for Climate Change targets homeowners and neighborhood committees, providing scientific expertise, technical guidance, and financial assistance for climate-sensitive practices. LCC principles are being adopted throughout the community. Many of the program's steps, such as shoreline naturalization and the use of native species, help increase biodiversity and habitat, while others emphasize reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program offers funding for LLC projects through its Bay Partners Grants.

When we reduce the unintended impacts of our landscaping and gardening practices, we preserve the vitality of our communities for generations to come. Helping the community make sustainable choices for today and tomorrow is an integral part of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program and Sarasota County's educational outreach mandate.

For more information about landscaping for climate change visit [www.sarasotabay.org](http://www.sarasotabay.org) or [www.scgov.net/sustainability](http://www.scgov.net/sustainability).

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