

# **Landscaping Evaluation Report**

## **Georgetown East Homeowners Association, Safety Harbor**

### **Site Visit – 5/31/2019**

To follow please find my report regarding overall impressions, issues and recommendations specific to Georgetown East Homeowners Associations' current landscaping practices and water conservation initiatives.

#### **OVERALL IMPRESSION AND ISSUES**

The original landscape was installed about 25 years ago. A number of plants have already been added or replaced.

##### **1.) Planting**

Many of the plants are planted very close to structures and too close together. Lack of aeration around plants might be a stress factor and may lead to a pest infestation. Also planting large shrubs too close to buildings, structures or walkways requires more frequent pruning to keep them 3'- 4' high. Therefore when designing a new landscape it is recommended choosing plants that don't grow taller and wider than desired to minimize pruning and maintenance. Pruning is discussed further below.

##### **2.) Turf**

The association has St. Augustinegrass in the landscape. Using proper landscaping maintenance practices, such as moderating nitrogen fertility, proper mowing height and only irrigating when the grass needs water, are ways to reduce environmental stress and thatch build-up.

Please refer to the booklet "**Best Management Practices**":

**[http://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/GIBMP Manual Web English 2015.pdf](http://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/GIBMP_Manual_Web_English_2015.pdf)**

and the fact sheets on Fertilization: **<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/LH/LH01000.pdf>**

Weed Management in Home Lawns: **<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP141>** and the

Florida Lawn Handbook **<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/features/handbooks/floridalawn.html>**

Environmental Stresses and Your Florida Lawn **<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep070>**

Mowing Your Florida Lawn **<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh028>**

Small and narrow strips of grass are difficult to maintain in regards of mowing, fertilizing and watering and could be replaced by a drought tolerant groundcover, low growing shrubs or mulch. If the turf has the purpose of edging a bed, it might be necessary to either use an edging material to hold the soil and mulch in place or use edging plants such as Society Garlic, Liriope or Mondo grass (for shade and partial shade) just to name a few. Please refer to the fact sheets on Groundcovers for full sun:

**Sunshine Mimosa** *Mimosa strigillosa* (medium salt tolerance)

**<http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/powderpuff-mimosa.html>**

and **Perennial Peanut** *Arachis glabrata* (high salt tolerance)

**<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep135>**

for full to partial sun: **Matchweed or Frogfruit** *Phylla nodiflora* (high salt tolerance)  
<https://www.fnps.org/plants/plant/phylla-nodiflora>  
or **Mondo Grass** *Ophiopogon japonicus* for shade (medium salt tolerance)  
<http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/groundcovers.html>

### 3.) Irrigation

The community is watering with potable (city/county) water. As a general guideline for irrigation: Each zone should have an output of approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$ " per watering cycle. The calibration of the sprinkler zones might be essential for correct watering and to determine the duration of watering per zone.

Please refer to the fact sheet on Calibration: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh026>

If the landscape is watered with spray heads and rotors in the same zone the spray heads will run two to five times longer than necessary. Therefore spray heads and rotors should be on different zones. Spray heads (pop-ups) can have a runtime between 20 and 30 minutes, rotors between 40 and 60 minutes to apply the recommended  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch of water.

**Pop-up spray heads can be replaced by high efficiency nozzles such as MP Rotators to match runtime with rotor heads.**

The irrigation schedule should also be adjusted accordingly, like being reduced in the cooler winter months (**skip a week of watering**) while plants are dormant (late October through early/mid-March) and being shut off during the summer rainy season and only turned on when needed. Please see information on

**Watering Your Florida Lawn** <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh025>

A regular inspection of the sprinkler heads and nozzles is recommended. Ideally the system should be inspected at least monthly for broken or misdirected sprinkler heads, system malfunctions and leaks. Necessary repairs should be performed immediately for water conservation reasons and landscape health.

If possible the turf areas and the beds should be watered with different zones because of the difference in water requirement for turf and shrubs.

It is required to have an **automatic irrigation-shut-off device** or a **soil moisture sensor** installed on every automatic irrigation system. Regular maintenance to assure proper functioning of the irrigation-shut-off device should be included in the irrigation maintenance program.

Soil moisture sensors are a more reliable and accurate irrigation control technology with less maintenance involved. Please refer to the fact sheet **Residential Irrigation System Rainfall Shutoff Devices**: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AE221> and **Smart Irrigation Controllers: How do Soil Moisture Sensors (SMS) Irrigation Controllers Work**: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ae437>

**Drip Irrigation:** For plant establishment and non-turf landscape areas it is recommended to use drip irrigation. Because drip irrigation brings the water to the plant root zone and

does not wet the entire landscape it is ideal for plant establishment with reduced water use. Drip irrigation typically requires half to a quarter of the volume of water required by comparable overhead-irrigation systems.

#### **4.) Pruning**

Pruning shrubs too frequently will result in plants having a woody/leggy appearance at the bottom and forming a green “canopy” on the top and will decline eventually. Bloom production is greatly reduced on flowering plants that are frequently pruned. Therefore when designing a new landscape it is recommended using plants that don’t grow taller and wider than desired to minimize pruning and maintenance.

The so called “Hurricane” pruning on palms is not recommended. Only brown palm fronds should be pruned. Green, yellow and partially brown fronds should **NOT** be taken off. Hurricane cuts will restrict the palms ability of photosynthesis (food production of the plant). Over time this will stress and weaken the palms which can lead to deformation of the trunk (pencil-pointing), make them more prone for breaking in heavy winds and can eventually kill the tree. Additionally overpruned and stressed palms are more receptive for diseases, such as Fusarium wilt. Seed pods can be removed anytime without harming palms. Please refer to attached documents on palm care.

The inspection **and pruning** of trees should be performed by a Certified Arborist. The website of the International Society of Arboriculture [www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com) lists local certified arborists <http://www.isa-arbor.com/faca/findArborist.aspx> and offers valuable information about why to hire a certified arborist as well as information about any tree related topic.

Removal of the dead wood within a plant and tree can and should be done any time using pruning shears, loppers, or a handsaw for trees. This landscaping practice not only gives the plant a neat appearance it also will make room for new growth and removes entryways for diseases.

Please refer to the UF/IFAS fact sheet **Pruning Landscape Trees and Shrubs:** <https://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/documents/PruningLandscapeTreesShrubs.pdf>

#### **5.) Mulching**

Mulch should be maintained 2”-3” deep. Mulch helps retain moisture in the soil and moderates soil temperature, it also helps to reduce erosion and weeds. There are many Florida-Friendly mulches available, like Eucalyptus, Melaleuca and Pine Bark mulch. Cypress mulch is **not** recommended because harvesting cypress trees from the wild negatively impacts wetlands. To make sure the mulch stays in place at a slope the use of **non- floating mulches such as Melaleuca and Eucalyptus mulch are recommended.** Always keep the mulch a couple of inches away from the base of shrubs and at least 1’ from tree trunks and from the foundation of buildings.

Please refer to fact sheets on Mulches:

<http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/planting/mulch.html>

[http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic\\_mulch](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_mulch)

If termites are an issue pine needles are a good alternative since they don't attract termites. Please refer to the UF/IFAS fact sheet The Facts about Termites and Mulch: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/IN/IN65100.pdf>

## 6.) Fertilization/Pest Control

### *Fertilization:*

Each variety of plant and tree has unique nutrient needs. One fertilizer will not necessarily meet the needs of all. Established *shrubs* and *trees* should only be fertilized if they show signs of deficiency and only during the growing season. Using a slow release fertilizer once or twice a year, **as needed**, is recommended. Ideally plants should be monitored for nutritional needs and **only fertilized when there are indications of malnutrition**.

**PLEASE NOTE:** To reduce polluted stormwater runoff during the rainy season Pinellas County has adopted a fertilizer ordinance that prohibits the use of fertilizers containing nitrogen between June 1 and September 30. Phosphorus should only be used if a soil analysis indicates lack of phosphorus in the soil.

*Turf* can be fertilized up to three times a year. A turf fertilizer with at least 50% of **slow release nitrogen** is required. Reducing the amount of fertilizer and pesticides used on your lawn will minimize the amount of chemicals running off into stormwater systems. Please refer to the fact sheet below on fertilization:

### **St. Augustinegrass for Florida Lawns:**

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/LH/LH01000.pdf>

### **Homeowners Best Management Practices for the Home Lawn:**

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP23600.pdf>

When palms are growing within turf areas it is recommended to use a palm and landscape fertilizer that benefits both landscape plants, palms and turf. Turf fertilizer which is higher in Nitrogen is not appropriate for palms. Please refer to e-mail attachments for information on palm fertilizer.

### *Pest Control:*

Applications of pesticides should **not** be done preventively, but **only when needed** (when pest occurs). Pest control operator should practice IPM (Integrated Pest Management). Recommended is spot treatment (not a broadcast application) using the least toxic remedy first. Refer to the Fact Sheet Natural Products for Managing Landscape and Garden Pests in Florida <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in197>

## 7.) Ponds

The association has three ponds. It is suggested to plant native vegetation in and around the ponds to reduce and prevent erosion and to absorb pollutants. The landscaping maintenance contractor should be informed to avoid blowing grass clippings and debris into stormwater drains. It is required to designate a buffer/low maintenance zone of at least 10' around the pond where no fertilizers or pesticides can be applied to reduce polluted runoff. Pinellas County recommends a 6' **no-mow** zone next to the water for soil

stabilization and erosion control. Please refer to the UF/IFAS fact sheet on

**Plants for Stormwater Ponds** <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep476>

**the Florida Lakes and Ponds Guidebook**

[https://www.pinellascounty.org/environment/watershed/pdf/adoptapond/Florida Lakes and Ponds Guidebook.pdf](https://www.pinellascounty.org/environment/watershed/pdf/adoptapond/Florida_Lakes_and_Ponds_Guidebook.pdf)

**The booklet Stormwater Systems in Your Neighborhood**

[https://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/sites/default/files/store\\_products/stormwater\\_systems.pdf](https://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/sites/default/files/store_products/stormwater_systems.pdf)

**Wildlife Habitat Creation In and Around Ponds**

[http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota-docs/hortres/AP-0228009-002\\_Wildlife\\_Urban\\_Ponds.pdf](http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota-docs/hortres/AP-0228009-002_Wildlife_Urban_Ponds.pdf)

### **8.) Invasive Plants**

The removal of non-native invasive plants and seedlings such as Brazilian pepper, Mexican petunia and torpedo grass is encouraged. The landscape should be monitored on a regular basis for the appearance of invasive species seedlings as they may quickly outgrow and displace your landscape plants. Refer to the fact sheets on Exotic Pest Plants

[http://bugwoodcloud.org/CDN/fleppc/plantlists/2019/2019 Plant List ABSOLUTE FINAL.pdf](http://bugwoodcloud.org/CDN/fleppc/plantlists/2019/2019_Plant_List_ABSOLUTE_FINAL.pdf) and the UF/IFAS Assessment: <http://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/>

## **SUGGESTIONS**

### **1.) Recommendations for the existing landscape/improvement of landscaping**

The suggestions you find in this report are based on the principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ developed by the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS), and the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program.

To improve the landscape, a change of landscaping practices is of the essence. If the community association agrees upon a different and in the long run healthier landscape, we can provide you with information how to achieve this goal.

Services such as leaf raking, hand weeding, hand pruning and removal of non-native invasive plants and seedlings that the association would like to have included in the regular landscaping maintenance could be specified in the landscaping maintenance contract. Also refer to the booklet **“Environmental Landscape Management Guidelines”** <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/EP/EP34700.pdf> and the UF/IFAS model landscape management contract (see e-mail attachment).

### **2.) Recommendations for a new landscape**

- Remove all plants of Category I Florida Exotic Plant Pest (FLEPPC) list before incorporating a new landscape.

Do not introduce new invasive plants that you find on that list.

<http://bugwoodcloud.org/CDN/fleppc/plantlists/2017/2017FLEPPCLIST-TRIFOLD-FINALAPPROVEDBYKEN-SUBMITTEDTOALTA.pdf>

- For redesigning the landscape or part of it, it is recommended to have a design in place.
- Plan for diversity to avoid monocultures.
- Test soil for pH.
- **Plant selection:** Choose the right plant for the right location (i.e. sun, shade, pH, space available, salt tolerance) and group plants according to their needs. Please refer to the website [www.floridayards.org](http://www.floridayards.org)—**Plant Database** and <https://www.fnps.org/plants> - **Florida Native Plant Society**
- Consider mature size of plants that don't grow taller than desired, to reduce pruning.
- Use plants that are adapted to our local soils and climate to reduce maintenance.
- Don't over-plant and give the plants room to grow into.
- Don't plant too deep.
- Provide adequate water for plant establishment and consider micro-irrigation for non-turf planting areas.
- Mulch, Mulch, Mulch

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6/4/2019