April Gardening Guide 2013
By Annemarie Post

Q: What is the purpose of the stormwater pond in our subdivision?

A: The purpose of the stormwater pond is to remove pollutants before they are transported to natural lakes, rivers and streams. They will never be pristine swimming or fishing lakes (i.e. clear of vegetation or phytoplankton) because their purpose is to trap and transform pollutants before water is transported downstream. Some algae and plants that homeowners sometimes find objectionable help provide this pollution removal function.

Stormwater ponds need to be cleaned out periodically (about every 25 years) to keep them functioning properly. However, some things can be done in the pond and the watershed to improve water quality and extend the periods between extensive maintenance efforts. An efficient functioning stormwater system takes as much time and effort as maintaining the rest of the landscape. In fact, highly maintained upland landscaping is a big part of the problem in keeping stormwater systems attractive.

Many homeowners do not connect their landscape design and maintenance practices to the problem in their stormwater ponds. Highly maintained lawns and direct discharge of stormwater into ponds cause much of the weedy growth in stormwater ponds. One of the most important steps in having a more attractive stormwater pond is to form a partnership with all the people in the community and then learn as much as possible about your particular pond. If you use a company for pond maintenance, please make sure to include them.

- Remove debris especially at the inflow and outflow of ponds and give special attention to drains and drop boxes. This will reduce the amount of pollutants that the pond will have to remove.
- Inspect the entire stormwater system on an annual or semiannual basis and make brief inspection trips after each storm. Cleaning up debris is an important part of the inspection. Leaves, limbs and other debris should be removed from the conveyance system. Establishing a buffer or no-mow zone and making sure the exhaust of your mower is not directed towards the pond will help keep grass cuttings out of the pond.
- Keep records of all maintenance needs plus work done on the pond.
- A permanent open water pool that never goes dry helps in sedimentation of pollutants and mosquito control. The permanent pool water should contain adequate amounts of dissolved oxygen. If this is a particular problem then perhaps an aeration device can be added. Also, desirable aquatic plant species will help remove dissolved pollutants. For more information about littoral zones please find “Lakes and Ponds” in the A-Z listing on the Sarasota County www.scgov.net website.

Removal of algae and nuisance plant species can be accomplished by rakes or hand pulling. If plant removal is part of the plan developed for your lake, obtain advice from your water management district (SWFWMD), Sarasota County Resource Protection department and your pond management company.

WHAT TO PLANT

Annuals: Plant heat-tolerant annuals, such as coleus, vinca, and portulaca.

Bulbs: Cannas thrive in the heat of summer. New varieties have colorful leaves as well as flowers.
Herbs: Add nasturtiums to your herb garden. The leaves and flowers add a peppery zest to salads.

Vegetables: Continue planting warm-season vegetables such as eggplant, southern pea, bush bean, sweet potato, and summer squash. Watch irrigation if the weather is dry.

**WHAT TO DO**

**Pests:** When monitoring insect activity, know which bugs damage plants and which do not. Some insects, such as ladybeetles should be encouraged in your yard! Contact the Master Gardener Help Desk (see contact information below under “Getting Help”) for help with insect identification.

**Flowering Plants:** Damaged flowers on gardenias and roses may indicate thrips are present.

**Tomatoes:** Watch for pests, disease, and nutritional disorders on developing tomato plants.

**Palms:** Identify and treat environmental and nutritional disorders in palm trees.

**Oleanders:** Chewed or ragged leaves indicate oleander caterpillars at work.

**Divide perennials and bulbs:** Divide clumps of bulbs, ornamental grasses, and herbaceous perennials to expand garden beds or to pass along to friends.

**Shrubs:** Choose from a wide variety of shrubs to add to the landscape now.

**WHAT TO DO EVERY MONTH**

- Adjust irrigation based on rainfall.
- Deadhead flowers to encourage new blooms.
- Monitor the garden for insects and disease.
- Plant trees, shrubs, and perennials and water until established.
- Mow lawns at recommended heights:
  - St. Augustine & Bahia: 3-4”
  - Centipede: 1.5-2.0”
  - Dwarf St. Augustine: 2.5”

**UPCOMING EXTENSION EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:**

Call 861-5000 or register on-line [http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu](http://sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu)

- Organic Food Gardening: Soil Management, Phillippi Farmhouse Market, 11:00 a.m., April 10
- Summer Cover Crops, North Sarasota Library, 10:00 a.m., April 13
- Sarasota Garden Club Series: Stormwater Ponds as Wildlife Habitat, Sarasota Garden Club, 10:00 a.m., April 17
- Plant Propagation, North Port Library, 6:30 p.m., March 12
- Worm Composting, Shamrock Park, 2:00 p.m., April 18
- Summer Cover Crops, Warm Mineral Springs, North Port, 10:00 a.m., April 19
- Summer Cover Crops, Nokomis Community Center, 3:00 p.m., April 19
- Rain Barrel Workshop, Woodmere Park, 10:00 a.m., April 20
- Organic Food Gardening: Fruit Trees, Phillippi Farmhouse Market, 6:00 p.m., April 24
- Irrigation 101, Twin Lakes Park, 2:00 p.m., April 24
- Market Gardening of Local Foods, Colonial Oaks Parks Park, multiple dates, first session: 6:00 p.m., April 24
- Brown Bag Gardening Series: Annuals and Perennials, Garden of the Five Senses 12:00 p.m., April 25
- Canning Tomatoes, Twin Lakes Park, 9:00 a.m., April 26
- Pruning for Tree Health, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m., April 27
- Introduction to Honey Bee Keeping, Gulf Gate Library, 2:00 p.m., April 30

**GETTING HELP**
The Master Gardener Help Desk at Twin Lakes Park is available to answer your questions. Call 861-9807 or email at mghelpdesk@scgov.net. Walk-ins are welcome Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. - 4 p.m., closed from noon-1 p.m. Satellite Help Desks are available weekly at library locations throughout Sarasota County.

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