

On Our Pond

A NEWSLETTER FOR CLEANER WATER & BETTER
AQUATIC ENVIRONMENTS IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Volume 15, No 1
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Join Adopt-A-Pond Now

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Night
April 3, 6-9p.m.
at MOSI.

On Our Pond

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Hillsborough County Public Works
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(813) 744-5671

www.hillsboroughcounty.org

Editor: John McGee
mcgeej@hillsboroughcounty.org
www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org

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Adopt-A-Pond is sponsored by Hillsborough County, and the
Northwest Hillsborough, Hillsborough River, and Alafia River
Basin Boards of the Southwest Florida Water Management
District, and YOU!



Lake, Pond & Stream Night Coming Soon



Lake, Pond & Stream Night is a fun way to learn more about our water resources!

The annual Lake, Pond & Stream Night is back this year on Friday, April 3rd from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Tampa. This event is a thank you to all of our program participants and an opportunity to celebrate the work that you do all year long.

Come browse exhibits from other programs and see products and services you might find useful in your lake, pond, and stream efforts. We'll also have some featured presentations throughout the evening. This year will include our first-ever discussion panel where you can ask questions of our panel of experienced volunteers and see how other groups have handled issues you might be facing. We're also inviting groups to set up a table to show off what they've done through the year. This is a perfect opportunity for service learning or to show parents what you have done in class!

As always, the MOSI exhibits will be open to enjoy. There will be plenty of giveaways, all culminating in our annual prize drawing! The MOSI cafe will be open for food sales throughout the evening as well.

Look for your invitation in the mail soon. We hope you'll come out and bring your family and friends. If any groups would like to set up a display to show off their accomplishments, space is available. Contact John McGee at mcgeej@hillsboroughcounty.org.

Get Out and Get In



We often think of ponds and lakes in terms of appearance, but they aren't just for viewing. They offer us so much more! Each water body is different, and activities such as swimming, boating, skiing, fishing, paddling, bird watching, flower collecting, biking, hiking, and geocaching can all be done around our fantastic water resources.

Adopt-A-Pond, Lake & Stream Management, and Stormwater Ecologist are all about experiencing our world with *all* our senses. So, whatever you'd like to do this spring, *get out* and *get into* the world around you! There's lots to do, and lots to learn. See what secrets and adventures you can find in your own backyard...and the conservation area next to it...and the public land beyond that!

Just remember to have respect for living things and for other people so we can all enjoy them now and forever.

Now is the Time to Join Adopt-A-Pond

If you've ever thought of adopting a pond in your community, I'd encourage you to get those applications in now. As everyone knows, local governments have recently been faced with major budget reductions. These reductions are expected to continue for the next few years. So far, Adopt-A-Pond has absorbed its portion of these reductions with little discernable impact to the services we provide. But that is likely to change. Our program will probably stay around, but the services we offer will be reduced. If you join now, you can receive the full services while they are still available.

So what does adopting a pond mean? The first thing you need is a group of people to work on it with you. Then you can apply to our program. You can't adopt a pond alone. If your pond meets all the criteria, we can help you design a management plan, clean out nuisance vegetation, and replant a beautiful pondscape that will help keep your pond healthy. All of our services are free to pond groups. All we ask is that you demonstrate a commitment to the project by attending a one-hour kickoff meeting in your neighborhood, participating in the development of the management plan, and planting the pond (a bare pond is an unhealthy pond).

One of the best things about our program is we don't tell you what you have to do. We help you design a long-term plan to get the pond in the condition you want. We advise about best techniques, management practices, landscaping, etc. The number of plantings and workdays are up to your group and vary depending on the condition of the pond and the goals you have for it.

As budgets get tighter and services are reduced, it is more crucial than ever for residents to take initiative in their own communities and keep them in order. Adopt-A-Pond is here to help you do it. To see the details and download an application visit www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org/aap.



Adopt-A-Pond helps you take care of your pond. Apply now to get started!

What's Good about Adopt-A-Pond



The Adopt-A-Pond Program brings neighbors together, and the work that they do together improves water quality, provides habitat, beautifies the landscape, decreases invasive species, increases property values, and gives participants and neighborhoods a (greater) sense of a cohesive community. The result is that the Adopt-A-Pond Group members become stewards of the environment, and see that they have a responsibility through the commitment in their community.

-Jason Winoker, 05-10 Black Pine

As a Lake Forest resident, I have learned to appreciate the beauty and delicate balance of life in our own lakes, as well as the positive feeling of working with my neighbors in the clean-up and replanting efforts. It makes me feel happy and satisfied to contribute to the health and future of my community's natural surroundings.

-Rosie Fajardo, 06-35 Lake Forest

Is your Landscaper Ripping You Off?

Most people hire a landscaper so they don't have to be bothered by the details of lawn maintenance. Hiring a professional to care for your yard is smart, right? Well, it can be. You know the price of gas. You know the price of milk. You know the details of your phone bill. But do you know what your landscaper does in your yard? Are they tacking on pointless extras that you don't really need? Do you understand what they recommend and why? Are they even following the guidelines for lawn maintenance? These are questions any responsible homeowner should be able to answer without hesitation.

You might think, "I don't care as long as the grass looks good." That's great if you have the money to say so. But even if value for your dollar isn't a concern, the health of your community should be. By allowing unchecked application of fertilizer, herbicide and water to your lawn, you may be contributing to public health issues, reduction of drinking water supplies, and impairment of our nationally-recognized waterways. These things all afford us the often envied lifestyle we enjoy in Florida. No one wants to be responsible for ruining that!

You may have a very responsible lawn service. But you would never leave employees, accountants, mechanics, or building contractors entirely to their own devices. Lawn service is no different. Adopt-A-Pond and the Extension Service can advise you on responsible landscaping practices. See your AAP Notebook or contact the Extension at 744-5519 for the publication, *Considerations for Developing a Landscape Maintenance Contract*.



Dumping grass clippings down a drain is illegal. Do you know what your landscaper is doing?

Pond Plant Spotlight—Muhly Grass



Muhly grass is showy and easy to grow.

Muhly Grass, or mist grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), is a clumping ornamental grass with wispy leaves and silky violet plumes that appear in summer and create a pinkish hazy cloud above the leaves. It grows about one foot high in dry settings, but can rise up to nearly four feet high if sufficiently wet. It is similar to cordgrass but with less diameter. The leaves are also darker and have a finer texture than cordgrass, making it a great plant for areas where a more compact ornamental grass is desired.

Muhly Grass is salt-, cold-, and drought-tolerant, and can do well even on sand dunes. It works well in yards or on the upper reaches of pond banks where occasional flooding occurs. Give it a try in your garden. I know you'll love this one.



Lake & Stream News

What is the “Fertilizer Ordinance” and How Does it Affect Me?

Lately, the term “Fertilizer Ordinance” has become a buzz word among governments, landscapers, and the news. There are a lot of rumors and misconceptions floating around out there but what is all the fuss really about?

The term refers to various legal instruments proposed, or recently passed, by local governments across the state, as well as to similar legislation at the state level that regulates the use of nitrogen as a residential fertilizer. These ordinances are a response to the fact that nitrogen is a major pollutant in many important water bodies, such as Tampa Bay. Nitrogen is a common ingredient of residential landscape fertilizer, which can get carried out of yards by rain and collect in ponds, lakes, streams, bays and coastal waters. Since federal and state regulations require local governments to manage nitrogen coming into these waters, one of the many tools governments are using is an ordinance to help minimize the amount of nitrogen coming from residential lawns.



In the Tampa Bay area, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP), which is made up of many different stakeholders in the bay’s health, has drafted a model ordinance for use in the Tampa Bay area to help create some uniformity in the region. The proposed ordinance has three points: 1) Require all commercial applicators of nitrogen fertilizer to be trained and certified so they do it correctly. 2) Restrict nitrogen fertilizer from being left on streets, sidewalks, or applied close to water where it isn’t needed and can easily wash away. 3) Restrict the application of nitrogen on residential and commercial properties during the rainy summer months to minimize runoff of nitrogen.

If passed in Hillsborough County, what does this mean for you? It depends on the actual language adopted. But landscapers might display a certification sticker on their trucks. Fertilizer at your local store might not have nitrogen in it from June—September. And application of nitrogen fertilizer might be restricted during that period. Many people who care for their own lawns already comply with the restrictions of the ordinance by simply following Florida-friendly landscaping practices. If you aren’t following these practices, you should start because it will save you money and protect the beautiful waters that we all enjoy in the Tampa Bay region!

We all have a vested interest in protecting our waters. Careless landscaping can result in green water. Use only the water and fertilizer that you need to keep your yard looking acceptable. In most cases, that’s less than you might think!

To see the model ordinance for yourself, visit:
<http://www.tbep.tech.org/Fertilizer/FertilizerHomePage.html>

Lake & Stream Volunteers Still Wanted

Lake volunteers need a boat, access to a lake, and a few hours of spare time each month.

Stream volunteers need a few hours of spare time to take samples.

Training and equipment are provided!

For more information or to volunteer, visit
www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org

**New volunteers receive a free
 T-shirt!**



Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Principle: Mulch

By Lisa Strange, FYN Community Association Coordinator

The following is the eighth in a series of articles on the nine principles of Florida-friendly landscaping, which are designed to produce attractive, low-maintenance, environmentally-friendly landscapes that also provide habitat for wildlife and reduce the spread of invasive plants.

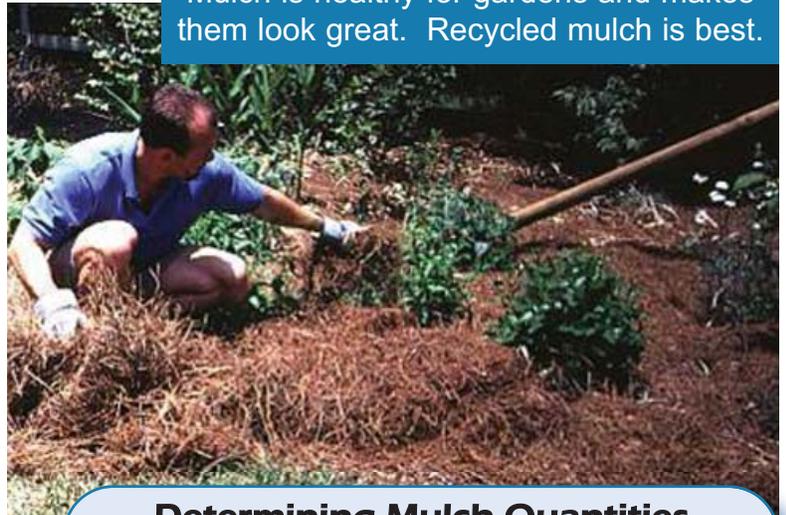
There are several benefits of mulch in the landscape. Organic mulch retains soil moisture, regulates soil temperature, suppresses weeds, reduces stormwater runoff, minimizes erosion, improves soil structure, provides increased area for root growth, and helps gardens look great. Apply mulch approximately 2 - 3 inches thick and re-apply as needed to maintain this depth. Mulches can replace turf or ground covers in areas that are difficult to mow, irrigate or otherwise maintain. Mulches also can be used in shady areas where plants may not grow readily.

Although several types of mulch are available in retail stores, organic or wood-based mulches are recommended. It is important to note that cypress mulch is harvested from natural cypress wetlands throughout Florida. Alternative mulches such as pine bark, pine straw, eucalyptus, melaleuca, and oak leaves are either by-products of the timber industry or planted specifically for mulch harvesting. Recycle your plant waste by using fallen leaves, pine needles, and grass and shrub clippings as mulch. Contact your local county Extension office for information on sources of recycled mulch.

Mulch entire landscape beds. Wood and bark mulches should be 2 - 3 inches deep after settling. Mulch newly-set plants after they are planted and irrigated. Re-apply mulch around established plants as needed to maintain proper depth. When mulching around trees, create a circle of mulch about 2 feet in diameter for every inch of trunk diameter, keeping 1 - 2 feet away from trunks to prevent rotting. Keep mulch at least 4 - 6 inches from exterior walls to discourage termites.

For more information on Florida-friendly landscaping, visit floridayards.org. To order a free Florida-Friendly Handbook and plant list from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, go to watermatters.org.

Mulch is healthy for gardens and makes them look great. Recycled mulch is best.



Determining Mulch Quantities

- 1** Determine the square feet of the area to be mulched. (Ex: 5ft x 20ft = 100 sq.ft.)
- 2** Determine the desired depth of the mulch, then convert from inches to a decimal of a foot. (Ex: 3 inches = 0.25ft.)
- 3** Multiply the decimal from Step 2 by the square feet to be covered (Step 1). (Ex: 0.25 x 100 sq. ft. = 25 cubic ft.)
- 4** Bagged mulch is available in volumes such as 2 cubic ft. You can now determine how many bags to buy. (Ex: 25 cu.ft. ÷ 2 = 12.5 bags)

Buying in Bulk

Depth	1 cubic yard covers	25 lbs covers	30 lbs covers
2"	162 sq. ft.	7.5 sq. ft.	9 sq. ft.
3"	108 sq. ft.	5 sq. ft.	6 sq. ft.
4"	81 sq. ft.	3.75 sq. ft.	4.5 sq. ft.

Adopt-A-Pond Groups also receive a copy in their Adopt-A-Pond Notebook. For more information on the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program, go to <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Refresher Course: Productivity

When you look at a lake or pond, what do you see? Does it just look like water? Can you recognize any of the plants, animals, or processes that are going on? The truth is, no two water bodies are ever exactly the same. But that makes them very hard to understand. So, scientists like to lump things into categories based on their characteristics. One way we classify water bodies is by their productivity. We talk about “eutrophic” and, “oligotrophic” but what does that mean, exactly?

Despite the scientific-sounding words, it really isn't that complicated. After all, we're trying to simplify a complex thing, not make it harder. These terms refer to what we call “trophic state”.

Trophic state is a classification system that looks at how much life a water body sustains...or its productivity! This is a convenient way to classify water bodies because it gives us a picture of what the water body looks like and tells us something about a lot of other factors like nutrients, fish populations, etc.

For example, a water body that doesn't sustain much life (oligotrophic, from Greek *oligo-*, “few” or “little” and *trophia*, “growth”) will typically have less nutrients, since that's the food source for plants, which start the food chain. With less nutrients we get less plants, and that means less animals. It also means less algae and organic matter in the water, so we get clearer water.

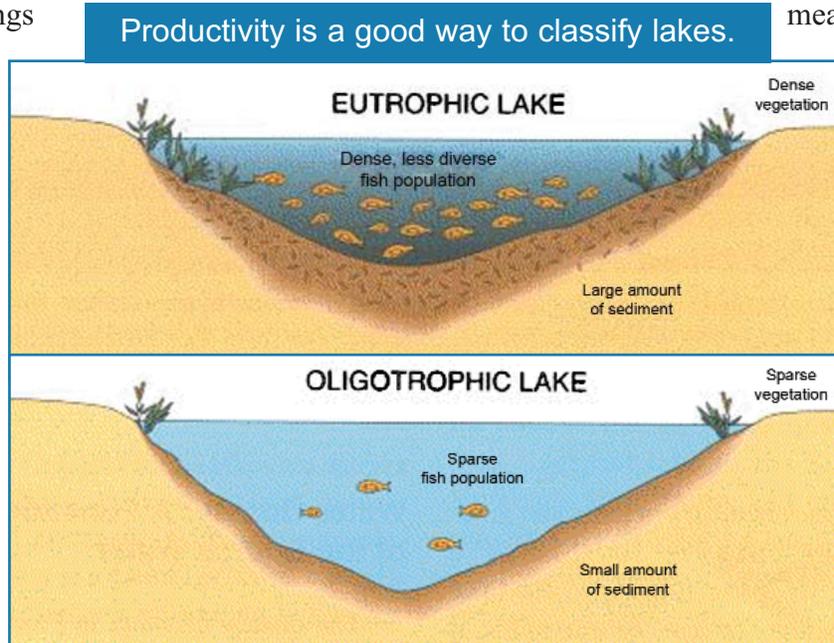
The opposite would be a eutrophic water body (*eu-* meaning “good” in Greek, so “good growth”). This kind of productive water body usually has plenty of nutrients, which means lots of plants, which means more organic matter and algae, so water is less clear. But plants, also mean lots of food and habitat for animals, so you get lots of fish and all the animals that feed on them.

But of course nature doesn't always fit neatly in our little boxes, so it is important to remember that each state on

the trophic state scale represents a range of productivity and water bodies also fall below, above, and in the middle.

To measure a water body's productivity scientists measure one or more of the following parameters:

total phosphorous, total nitrogen, total chlorophyll, water clarity, and aquatic plant abundance. Any one of these will give us an idea of productivity. Lakewatch uses chlorophyll, with plant abundance factored in, to measure trophic state because these are direct measurements of what is really growing in a water body.



Sometimes, we extrapolate these various parameters using mathematical formulas to arrive at something called a trophic state index (TSI). The index is really just a number scale so we can compare more easily. But with any extrapolation we have to be careful about errors working in so some scientists, including Lakewatch, stick with the more direct numbers and skip TSI.

Whether you use TSI or think about trophic state in terms of actual measurements, it is a useful tool for describing water bodies. But we have to understand its limitations. Trophic state only tells us the productivity, not the health of a water body. Boaters and swimmers may prefer lower trophic states for clearer water. But anglers may prefer higher states because of the increased fish populations. What's important is to note how we change productivity. If a water body was historically less productive and is becoming more productive, we may be causing it through increased nutrient runoff. This can be damaging to a system that isn't adapted to that level of productivity and problems can result. This is the case in many of our lakes, and in Tampa Bay.



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Visit These Websites

Adopt-A-Pond Webpages:
www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org/aap

Extension Office:
<http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu>

Frog Listening Network:
www.seaworld.org/fln/in.htm

Hillsborough County Watershed Atlas:
www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org

LAKEWATCH:
<http://lakewatch.ifas.ufl.edu>

Hillsborough County Environmental
Protection Commission:
www.epchc.org

Southwest Florida Water Management
District: www.watermatters.org

Tampa Bay Estuary Program:
www.tbep.org

A Sense of Place

Do you know any places? Really know them? Try this activity to sharpen your senses and you'll be amazed what you discover. Find a quiet secluded spot outside, the wilder the better—a corner of your yard, an out of the way spot in a park, even a weedy corner of a parking lot. Then visit the spot regularly for 30 minutes at a time. Sit quietly. Move as little as possible. What do you hear? feel? smell? see? Don't take notes, just sit. In a surprisingly short time, you'll begin to see how much life is actually in that place. Some things may even begin to observe you! As you get to know your special place, you'll begin to see how it changes from week to week, and month to month. After your observation time, you can write or draw about what you remember. You'll find that you can become very attached to places once you really know them.

