

On Our Pond

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



Volume 14, No 4
Winter 2008

The 2008 Best Maintained Pond

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Education Meetings

- 08-15 Willow Brook
- 08-16 Carroll Grove Estates
- 08-17 Country Place West

Initial Plantings

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- 08-15 Willow Brook

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2009 Adopt-A-Pond Calendars

This year features landscapes from Adopted ponds. Calendars are free while they last!

Request yours at

mcgee@hillsboroughcounty.org
or 744-5671.

On Our Pond

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(813) 744-5671
www.hillsboroughcounty.org

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

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



Pond Judging—Behind the scenes

This year’s judging was held on October 14. A team of six judges visited all ponds that had been submitted for judging. There were 13 in all, from Sun City to Lutz and over to the west County line. Each pond was ranked according to eight factors that represent Adopt-A-Pond program goals. Each category receives between 1-5 points except for storm drain marking, which gets one point if drains are marked. Judges fill out the sheets anonymously and the scores are compiled. The best possible score is 216 points. This year our winner, 98-07 Greco-Sherman Pond, topped 06-35 Lake Forest by 1 point! Several ponds were in the upper cluster, and then trailed down pretty evenly to a score of 105. Our only ever two-in-a-row winner slipped this year to fifth place, but still looked great. Some ponds in their first year of adoption made a good showing as well, falling right in the middle. Even those on the bottom looked pretty good. I think some errant herbicide explains the scores on the bottom two. Gotta watch those contractors!

Pond	Score
98-07	161
06-35	160
06-28	153
03-07	152
05-10	150
03-17	146
08-09	140
08-13	137
08-02	130
06-39	122
06-23	112
06-13	107
07-09	105

Congratulations to all of our competing ponds on making great strides to improve their pond appearance and quality. This year every competitor received our brand-new organic cotton t-shirts featuring a new slogan. I’ll give away a hat to match if anyone can tell me what the slogan means!

The Criteria

1. Storm drains marked
2. Pollution control
3. Wildlife usage/habitat value
4. Native/FL friendly techniques
5. Improvements for human use
6. Percentage of plant coverage
7. Percentage of nuisance species
8. Overall appearance

Meet Ian—Our New Intern



Ian Gangaram is a new intern with our program. He is currently working on a dual major degree in Environmental Science and Policy and Economics at USF. He already has a degree in Information Systems Management from City University in New York.

Ian has a strong interest in sustainable economic development and renewable energy. He wants to learn as much as he can about how governments manage resources and effect change. Ian hopes to eventually use his diverse interests to improve and create more environmental programs in his native Trinidad.

In his free time Ian enjoys soccer, cricket, and outdoor activities. Around here, we’ve spared no time in putting Ian to work. He’s been knee deep in ponds working with vegetation and up to his eyes in paperwork and meetings. When asked how he feels about all of it, Ian is quick to reply, “That’s cool!”

We think his enthusiasm, flexibility, and willingness to contribute ideas are pretty cool too. Thanks Ian!

2008 Best Maintained Pond Is...98-07 Greco-Sherman



Congratulations to 98-07 Greco-Sherman Pond! Greco-Sherman is nestled in a rural community tucked away on the north edge of Tampa. The pond itself is less than an acre, but backs up to a large cypress wetland which serves as the outfall for the pond.

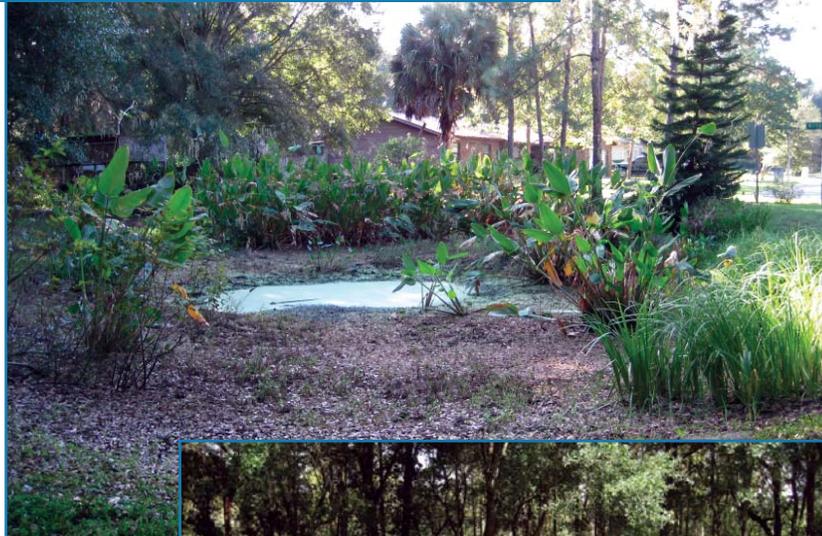
A 360° panorama (above) gives you a sense of the whole landscape. (Right) the pond is currently very low.

This is one of the most unique ponds that has ever won our competition and it may come as a surprise to many of you. Remember that rankings are based on several criteria that meet the goals of our program, such as use of native vegetation, control of nuisance species, and function of the pond. Greco-Sherman scored high in all of these categories because it uses a very natural landscape design. Even in terms of overall appearance, it integrates so well with the surrounding yards that there is no break in continuity from house to pond to forested wetland.

Melody Greco, the representative for this pond group, began working on the pond in 1993 and applied for Adopt-A-Pond. But in those days it took three years for her to get a cleanup. Eventually they got it and over time, they kept the focus on wildlife, blending the landscape together.

Mel describes her landscape design, “I wanted the yard to look like

The surrounding yards are a shady retreat that invites people to linger.



Judges loved the huge fire flag and iris!

a park...and I made the flow of the yard include the pond. We do have grass in our front yard, but we don't allow fertilizer or chemicals to be used near the pond...and we also mow around the pond to keep the vegetation in check, so it doesn't get overgrown. I really wanted the pond to be a natural habitat—not really manicured...there's nothing more beautiful than nature.”

Even more incredible is the fact that this pond goes dry every year and when it fills up, it's covered in duckweed...but only the native variety. Managing the pond naturally means this is no problem. The Greco-Sherman group knows the pond is never static and finds the beauty in that ever-changing balance.

Rain Barrels : There's no downside!

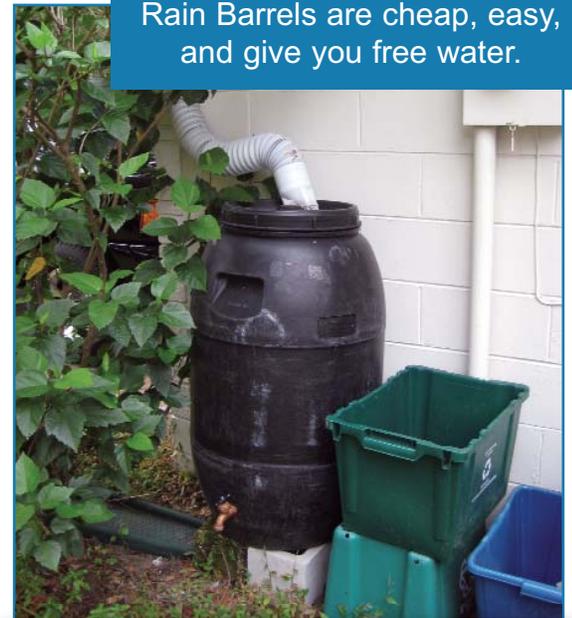
As we leave the wettest part of the year, irrigation can become an issue. Many of us have landscapes that don't require much if any irrigation. Some of us have reclaimed water, which is more environmentally friendly and less expensive than potable water. But one thing all of us have is a large water collector capable of gathering thousands of gallons in a few minutes. I'm talking about our roofs.

Roofs keep us dry by catching rainwater. Many of them even pipe the water down to the ground through gutters and downspouts. The problem is the collector only works when it's raining, which isn't when we need it. If only we had a way to hold that water until we did need it!

Well, we do: rain barrels! Rain barrels are basically small cisterns to hold water from your roof. Cisterns are a common way of creating water supply. They have been used for centuries, and are still used in water-sparse locations today. While some houses have large cisterns that hold thousands of gallons, not many of us can get one of those. But because of their low cost and self-contained design, you can easily fit rain barrels into just about any situation.

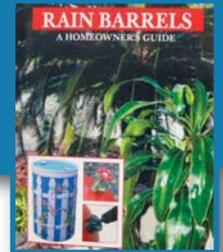
A 50 gallon barrel costs about \$20.00. When you add in the hardware, downspout connector, and blocks to set it on, it comes to about \$36.00. Barrels fill in a matter of seconds during a decent rain and you can use the water for irrigation, car washing, and any other nonpotable use! If you like the convenience of an automatic system, rain barrels will easily support drip irrigation. You can even take a class at the Extension Service that provides a complete barrel and helps you assemble it. There's really no downside!

Rain Barrels are cheap, easy, and give you free water.



FREE RAIN BARREL GUIDE

Email mcgeej@hillsboroughcounty.org or call 744-5671 to receive a free full color guide to building and using a rain barrel!



Blue Flag Iris is a great plant for wet shady spots.

Pond Plant Spotlight—Blue Flag Iris



Blue Flag Iris (*Iris virginica*) grows well in wet, acidic soils in full sun, but also does well in shade. It typically grows between 2 – 4 feet tall. In late spring it features non-fragrant violet-blue flowers with falls that are crested with yellow and white. Flower color can vary considerably from very light blue to purple. Bright medium green, sword-shaped leaves often lay on the ground or in the water.

The root mass of established colonies provides good shoreline protection. They make lovely additions to the garden and are ideal for the borders of a pond, preferring soils that are high in organic matter. These elegant natives are medium-size plants that work well in flat, shallow spots or up the bank from the deeper aquatic plants. But they are easily confused for young cattails and are often killed by

mistake. Iris can be distinguished by their flat fan-like shape; cattails are round at the base and the leaves twist as they grow. Also be careful when mowing. Once cut, iris will come back, but can be hard to find among the grass!



Lake & Stream News

New Lake & Stream Program Manager...sort of

At long last we have been able to hire for the position formerly occupied by Jason Mickel. It took a while with hiring freezes, budget cuts, departmental reorganization, etc. But the position has now been filled. You might know the person...since it's me! Hello.

Of course with all the recent changes, the role of this job has changed as well. This position used to be responsible for the Lake and Stream programs alone. But now it covers all the Stormwater Environmental Education Programs plus the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit (NPDES) program and the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program. But in the long term, we expect to fill two more positions in this team, starting with an Education Programs Coordinator. Then we'll be able to gear back into the Lakes and Streams programs. For the time being though, I will continue to focus primarily on Adopt-A-Pond and the other educational programs that require so much attention,

while taking on other essential functions of the new position.

The downside is that all the programs will slow down some (that means longer waits, so plan ahead to get your applications and requests in). The upside is that, as part of one overarching program, we'll see more unity between the programs. So in the future, look for more about lakes and streams in this newsletter, as well as other new and exciting things along with some of your old favorites.

I am excited about the possibilities opened by the new organization and look forward to working with you.

More on John

For those of you who don't know me, I have a degree in Environmental Policy from Eckerd College. I've worked in the environmental field for 8 years, 7 of that with Hillsborough County. I am native to Florida and come from an agricultural family. I speak Japanese, am active in the Japanese-American community, serve as a children's minister at my church, love outdoor activities (particularly those involving water), and read constantly.

Thanks,
John McGee

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: Reduce Runoff

By Lisa Strange, FYN Community Association Coordinator

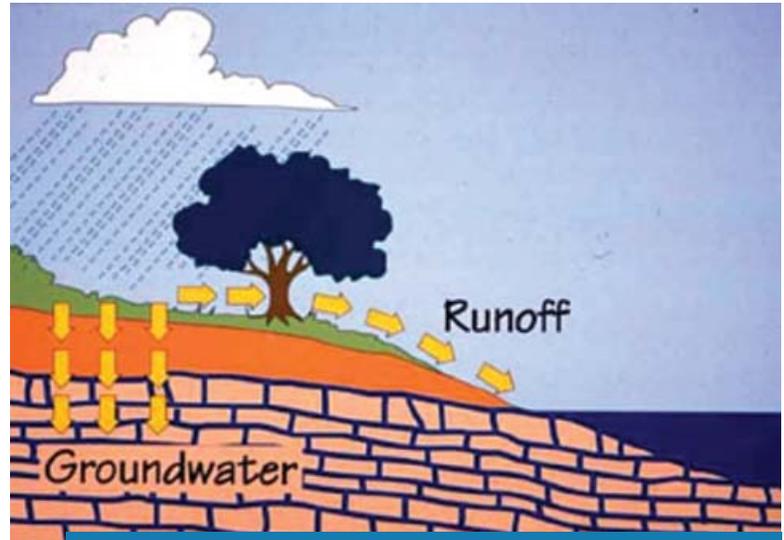
The following is the seventh in a series of articles on the nine principles of Florida-friendly landscaping which are designed to produce attractive, low-maintenance, environmentally-friendly landscapes that also provide habitat for wildlife and reduce the spread of invasive plants.

In Florida, rainstorms can produce heavy downpours of rain which rush over the land carrying debris such as oil from cars, silt, and dissolved nutrients to natural or man-made waterways. This is known as stormwater runoff.

Soil and plant material are natural filtering systems. Rain water is the source of irrigation for your Florida-friendly landscape. We want to keep the rain in our yards! The following landscape practices reduce the amount of stormwater runoff:

- Direct downspouts onto your lawn or flower beds where the water is needed.
- Use porous materials in the landscape that will allow rainwater to seep into the ground. Mulch, bricks, gravel and pavers can be good porous materials for sidewalks, paths, driveways or patios.
- Sweep grass clippings up from streets and place back onto the lawn.
- Use cat litter or absorbing material for oil spills/leaks on driveways.
- Create swales or berms to help divert runoff or trap the rainwater.
- Use rain barrels or cisterns to collect thousands of gallons of water that can be used later.
- Pick up trash and pet waste to reduce bacterial and nutrient pollution.

Our yards are part of our environment. Florida-friendly landscaping ideas tend to cooperate with pre-existing natural conditions rather than battle the elements. Work with them. Adapt your changes to the natural environmental cycles already taking place and protect our environment at the same time.



Reducing runoff keeps water where it is needed and prevents water pollution.



For more information on working with stormwater runoff in your yard, contact your local county UF/IFAS Extension office. 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. 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: Stormwater Pond Regulations

Have you ever noticed that old neighborhoods don't have many ponds? That's because the regulations requiring ponds weren't in place when the neighborhood was built. Stormwater ponds are flood prevention and water treatment facilities. Of course they can also make great amenities to a community, but that is not the reason they are constructed. In fact, developers include them in neighborhoods because they are required by regulations. Without ponds, there are more lots to sell!

This is important to understanding how ponds work and what they can become. The science behind the pond is that they collect stormwater and its associated pollutants. Through a combination of biological and physical processes, they separate out the pollutants so the water is cleaner when it enters natural waterways that could be damaged. To that end, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) both have regulations on how big ponds have to be, how they can be constructed, and what can go on in them. The details are complex but suffice to say, they try to preserve the way water flows through an area, reduce the flash flood potential from paved surfaces, and clean the amount of water expected to runoff.

When the community is being built, the developer is the "Operating Entity" on these permits. But when the developer is done, the permits don't go away. The operating entity is changed to another party, like an HOA or CDD. (This is one of the lesser known reasons for the popularity of HOA's now. The developer needs some entity to turn the permit over to.) That means the new operating entity is then responsible for compliance. When we buy a house, all of this history is built into the

place and comes with it, despite what the realtor might say about springs and maintenance or whatever else.

If we buy into a development that is out of compliance, we will be stuck with that. If a permitted area goes out of compliance while we live there, it is our responsibility.

Stormwater ponds are regulated water treatment facilities. Homeowners should know the rules.



Standard Condition of Environmental Resource Permit

32. (Formerly #36) The removal of littoral shelf vegetation (including cat-tails) from wet detention ponds is prohibited unless otherwise approved by the District. Removal includes dredging, the application of herbicide, cutting, and the introduction of grass carp. Any questions regarding authorized activities within the wet detention ponds shall be addressed to the District's Surface Water Regulation Manager, Tampa Service Office.

Contact the Southwest Florida Water Management District at **985-7481** for info on permits in your development.

Let me give you a common example. When we buy a house, the pond is clean and relatively empty because it's newly created. But the permit requires that the shallow end of the pond be allowed to grow vegetation naturally. In a year, the developer pulls out and transfers responsibility. The shallow shelf, which is designed and permitted to do just what it's doing (i.e. grow vegetation) slowly becomes weedier and weedier.

Eventually resident complaints get the HOA to hire a contractor to kill everything. Now the pond is back to the way it looked when we bought in...but it is *also* now in violation of the permit! This could open the development up to fines and enforcement action.

Fortunately, this particular problem is cheap to fix. Other problems involving alterations of the pond can have hefty price tags that HOA's don't often anticipate.

Ponds can be great amenities to use and enjoy. But as always, it is in our interest to know what we are buying and understand the restrictions. All of these rules are in place far before we as residents come into the picture. Learning the details and doing the research is just smart shopping. Owning property is too big of an investment to skip the research on what it entails!

The Adopt-A-Pond Program
Hillsborough County Public Works Dept.
Specialized Services
2420 N Falkenburg Rd.
Tampa, FL 33619
Bill to Mail Code 1384

Pre sort Standard
U.S. Postage Paid
Tampa, FL 33601
Permit No 295



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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>

Science Daily:
www.sciencedaily.com

Southwest Florida Water Management
District: www.watermatters.org

Tampa Bay Estuary Program:
www.tbep.org

2009 Calendars available now!

This is our third edition of the popular Adopt-A-Pond wall calendar. Each year features a different theme. The 2009 calendar exhibits landscapes from adopted ponds. Photos are selected from pond group members' submissions and from our program files. Thank you to all of those who submitted, and congratulations to those whose photos were selected for the calendar.



Calendars are free while supplies last. Contact us at mcgee@hillsboroughcounty.org or call 744-5671 to request your copy now!