

Garden like a Floridian this fall

Keeping fertilizer out of streams, rivers and the lagoon boosts property values — and protects fun

With the summer rainy season ending, bans on using fertilizer in St. Lucie, Martin, Indian River, Brevard and Volusia Counties will be lifted on September 30. But before you pull on your gardening gloves, here are some ways to spruce up your yard while still protecting the reason most of us came here in the first place: the spectacular waterways that make the Indian River Lagoon area so special.

5 Fall Yard Care Tips

Slow-release saves money. If you plan to use fertilizer, make sure the nitrogen content is at least 50% slow release. This not only saves you time (fewer applications), it's also cheaper (fewer applications). It's also required under fertilizer laws in St. Lucie, Martin, Indian River, Brevard and Volusia Counties. The best time to use slow-release fertilizers is October, when plants are not too cold to grow. You won't need to fertilize again until the spring.

Don't forget the lawn guy. If you use a lawn-care service, ask them to fertilize only twice a year and to use a slow-release product when they do. After all, our fun — boating, fishing, and relaxing by the water — is at stake. And so are our property values. Fish kills and dead zones from fertilizer-fed algae aren't just depressing to deal with; they also depress real estate prices.

Treat it like gold. Most of us use way too much fertilizer. And more is not better — for your plants, your pocketbook, or nearby waterways. Experts say Florida yards need two applications a year at most, in October and April.

Get ready for winter: When buying new plants, check to see if they can tolerate our winter temperatures. Plant any cold-sensitive plants in the warmest parts of your yard and add 2 to 3 inches of mulch to hold in heat. And hold off on pruning till spring; even in early fall it can get too chilly at night for newly trimmed plants.

Cut your water (bill): Grass grows more slowly in the fall and winter. Watering too often just gives you a wet lawn and a bigger utility bill. Water the grass about once a week in the fall, and once every 10 to 14 days in the winter. You can go longer if it rains.

Visit BeFloridianNow.org for more ideas on how to garden the Florida way.

