

Be Floridian Now in an HOA

How to incorporate new, smarter gardening techniques in your deed-restricted community

People who love Florida know that the right landscaping can make your yard look beautiful without requiring a lot of maintenance. And that means you can spend more time fishing, boating or relaxing instead of toiling in the yard each weekend.

People who love Florida also know that plants suited to our unique climate need less fertilizer to thrive. And that helps protect our lakes and bays from the icky algae blooms that feed on fertilizer runoff, killing fish and ruining our fun.

A 2009 Florida law gave homeowners in deed-restricted communities the right to adopt a Florida-friendly approach to their yards. No, this does not mean you can rip up your lawn and turn it into a gravel parking lot for your boat. And yes, this is exactly what your homeowners association is afraid of.

If you want to change your landscaping to incorporate more plants that are suited to the Florida climate, start by looking at it from your HOA's point of view. After all, it is their responsibility to protect your community property values. That means they are looking out for you.

So before you begin, be sure to know your rights. But be sure also to remember your neighborly manners. Ready to get started?

4 steps to getting HOA approval for your yard makeover

1. First, read your HOA documents. They will spell out your landscape requirements, which may be different from what your neighbors say they are. Many deed restrictions do not require grass; or if they do, they may not require a certain type. But almost all require plants covering most of a home site.
2. Do your homework. Sketch out what changes you want to make to your landscape, and draw up a simple design you can show your HOA board. Help them visualize what you want to do. Show them photos of the plants you want to use, or completed landscapes similar to what you envision. If you are totally clueless about landscape design, hire a designer or gardening coach. Our Be Floridian NOW partners are great resources. It's not as expensive as you might think, and their professional expertise may help the HOA approval process go more smoothly.



3. Be prepared. Write a formal letter to your HOA requesting permission to make your landscape more Florida-friendly. Mention that Florida law now allows homeowners even in deed-restricted neighborhoods to install Florida-friendly landscapes. Keep it cordial and positive; don't assume they will say no or be unreasonable. Request a meeting so that you can show them your beautiful landscape design, and tell them in person how your changes will enhance the community and protect the environment, which in turn protects property values by keeping Tampa Bay an attractive place to live. Be willing to negotiate.
4. Be patient. Remember that most HOA boards are composed of residents who volunteer to serve. They are busy just like you. Give them time to get back to you, and don't pester them. Make sure you start the HOA approval process well before you actually want to start digging up grass and moving dirt. For example, if you plan a spring makeover, lay the groundwork in the winter. Save yourself a lot of trouble and don't start until you secure approval from your HOA.

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

