

This spring, get the yard of your dreams

Ah, springtime in Florida. Warm beaches to visit; vacations to plan; and long, long hours to spend toiling over never-ending lawn care ...

If trying to turn your less-than-perfect patch of grass into the Mother of All Green Lawns takes all the fun out of your spring dreams, you are not alone.

There's a reason for this: Florida's climate is tough on lawns. And the more time we spend trying to produce an emerald green expanse like they have Up North, the less time we have to enjoy all the fun Florida has to offer — and the more likely we are to end up polluting the beautiful waterways that we came here to enjoy in the first place.

Here's how to escape the nightmare and return to your dream of a Florida spring.

5 Ways to Help Your Yard Spring Into Shape

Aim high. With the mower, that is. Taller grass develops deeper the roots — and helps your lawn withstand heat and dry spells. Most homeowners cut the grass too short. You know better. St. Augustine grass shouldn't be mowed lower than 3.5 to 4 inches.

Less is more. If you routinely throw fertilizer on your lawn, you are just throwing money away. Twice a year is sufficient — once in spring, and once in the fall.

Go slow. Using slow-release fertilizer is required by law in Pinellas County, Manatee County and Tampa — and should be required by your budget. It not only gives you more bang for your buck, it helps your lawn develop a strong root system. Check the fertilizer bag to make sure the nitrogen content is at least 50% slow release.

Put your lawn on a diet. Replace a corner of your lawn with shrubs, small trees, or an easy-to-maintain groundcover like Asiatic jasmine or perennial peanut. Expand your landscape beds a little bit at a time, and before you know it you'll be devoting your weekends to relaxing instead of mowing, weeding, and edging.

Save the water (bill). Don't water till you can see footprints in your lawn and the leaves of your plants are curling — overwatering is not healthy for your yard. And make sure your sprinklers aren't watering the sidewalk — that's money down the drain.

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