

**FDEP CZ814  
MULLOCK CREEK BASIN RESORATION  
HOMEOWNER FLORIDA FRIENDLY YARDS**

**Final Report**

**LESSONS LEARNED**

During the implementation of this project, several obstacles and trends emerged that need to be addressed if a similar project is to happen in another neighborhood. Making needed changes and understanding the human element of any new project only serves to make the next time more successful.

Listed below are seven “Lessons Learned” which are already being incorporated into similar projects that the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program sponsors.

**Lesson #1:** Use of the internet for ongoing communication.

Today, we usually see internet communications as THE way to alert the people we need to reach about upcoming events. For this project, there was a definite increase in residents attending follow up classes, workdays and plantings if a telephone call was made to everyone less than 7 days from the actual event. Telephone calls also work with the media if you have a personal contact. The internet is certainly a great way to broadcast spread the word, but if you want results, better pick up the phone call direct.

**Lesson #2:** Less is more.

Three hours is a long time to sit and process new information, especially if you are past your twenties, working full time, raising kids and/or caring for parents. People have so much going on in their lives; classes need to be simple, with information for them to continue learning on their own. Class time could be taken down to two hours with a ten minute break.

**Lesson #3:** Offer more choices of classes.

At first, we offered three introductory classes followed the next week by a design class. Attendance in the second class dropped sharply. Again, these are working people, they need more choices. Offer six introductory classes and six design classes. Offer them in a scattered way, maybe two introductory, then two design etc.

**Lesson #4:** Saturdays and weekdays don't work.

The class with the highest number of participants was Friday night at 6pm. This seems to work best for working class communities.

**Lesson #5:** Simplify.

The “take home message” from both classes benefits from simplification. The introductory class should be less like the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods class. Break it down to three focuses: NO chemicals, NO extra water, ALL native plants equals a healthy yard, more butterflies, more satisfaction.

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**Lesson #6:** Who will take care of it?

The biggest obstacle of all was getting commitments from volunteers to steward the demonstration gardens. It is unfortunate that Lee County Parks and Recreation could not be of more assistance with this task.. All demonstration yards, gardens need ongoing maintenance. At first, everyone who heard about the project, especially civic groups promised they would help. Lee County Parks & Recreation, who already maintains the park, said they could not do it because it would be extra work. We were taking large chunks of grass out of mowing, and all personnel had to do is get off the tractor and pull some weeds, but no go. We ended up with six residents committing to ongoing weeding, mulching and watering if needed. Just recently, a group that teaches life skills to the mentally handicapped has made the commitment to ongoing maintenance of the demonstration yard areas. I will teach them, and also show them how to recognize seedlings of the natives that they can pot up and sell.

**Lesson #7:** University Volunteers

Despite Florida Gulf Coast University's student community service requirement and advertising with FGCU and through professors, we had NO university volunteers. This was disappointing since a second project that the CHNEP was sponsoring during the same time period had an overabundance of university student volunteers

**WHAT WE LEARNED – Positive results**

People know more than you think. The project manager was always amazed how much residents were already aware of climate change, green alternatives, natives, the problems with chemicals. What they needed was good information that got them to take action in a way that made sense to them.

People know less than you think. The project manager thought that the basics of caring for turf grass would be known to all homeowners, considering how much lawn is out there. Not so. Those who would be keeping some turf grass areas had no idea on how to care for it. They were allowing “professionals” to do it for them and getting unhealthy lawns in the process. Here we were able to help a great deal. There were also a few class takers who had let their yards become a toxic wasteland, all because of the “mow and blow” mentality in SW Florida.

People care more than you know. Already, class takers are spreading the word to their children's schools, to their neighbors, to their families. They really do care about environmental issues, about the health of their estuary and ultimately the health of their children. And someone can speak to them plainly and truthfully, they listen. And change their behavior.

You can't please everyone. Some of our class takers thought the demonstration yard should be a “garden”, more like a botanical garden. Making sure we used the word yard versus garden helped, but not everyone is happy with the results.

This can work. The project manager believes by improving on what we have already done, this type of project can make a real difference in neighborhoods all over Florida. People know when you are giving them real information that makes a real difference, and they want to change. The hardest part is being able to reach everyone.

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**BUDGET**

**The following numbers represent a breakdown of this project.**

**Classes Offered:** 4 Introductory Classes  
5 Design Classes

43 people representing 37 yards took the introductory class.  
41 took the design class.  
33 yards received a \$60 coupon for native plants and a yard sign.

Supplemental one-on one sessions

**Installations:** 3 Installations, Front (formal), Side (Butterfly) and Littoral (Wet)

**Workdays:** 3

**Volunteer Hours:** Documented 519 @ \$17.00 per hour = \$8,823.00  
(includes classes, installations, workdays and work on personal yards)  
Undocumented: 28 people at first class at 3 hours = 84 hours = \$1,428.00  
Total: \$10,251.00

**In Kind Hours:**

Bickford, Karen	Lee County	2.5
Demers, Nora	FGCU	13
Guitierrez, Amanda	Lee County	15
Honnen, Debbie	Lee County	10
Donley, Liz	CHNEP	104

Undocumented in-kind services: WGPU advertising project on its website; Lee County Parks and Recreation staff preparing the plots for planting; True Value Hardware staff assisting with demonstration garden planting; Lee County donating use of community center for classes.

**Disbursements**

<b>Staff</b>	<b>\$9,660.00</b>
<b>Plants</b>	<b>\$3593.66</b>
<b>Tools, Rainbarrels</b>	<b>\$ 948.68</b>
<b>Signs</b>	<b>\$ 817.65</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$15,019.99</b>