

WISER LAWNS AND LANDSCAPE WORKSHOPS FOR NEW RESIDENTS LEAD TO WATER SAVINGS

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Sumter County is located northeast of Tampa, west of Orlando, and encompasses 580 square miles which includes 33 square miles is surface water. Sumter County has a rapidly expanding population due to exponential growth of The Villages, a 55+ retirement community of 138,000 residents as of 2022 noted in thevillages.com. A significant number of residents moved to Florida, making it crucial to educate all individuals on sound environmental practices, particularly regarding the protection of water quality and quantity. The Floridan Aquifer, responsible for providing approximately 90% of our drinking water, can become depleted and degraded when inefficient irrigation practices are used or when irresponsible fertilizer usage leads to pollution. Therefore, it is essential to implement programming efforts that emphasize the nine principles of Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) to address these concerns.

WISER Lawns and Landscapes Workshops for New Residents, offered twice monthly in person and once by webinar, introduce residents to environmentally sound landscaping practices leading to the protection of water quality and quantity through FFL. Residents responding to a follow-up survey after attending a WISER Lawns and Landscapes Workshop demonstrated change: For example, 28% (n=476) adjusted run times based on seasonal weather changes; 28% (n=476) checked for broken heads or leaks; 31% (n=117) reduced irrigating from three to two days per week; 25% (n= 208) set their irrigation on manual and water on an as needed basis; 15% (n=270) used a slow or controlled release fertilizer on landscape plants; and, 22% (n=389) minimize fertilization in the winter months . Changes in irrigation practices of residential horticulture program participants' survey results led to an estimated water savings of 34,408,481 gallons with an estimated savings of \$118,709 based on \$3.45 per 1,000 gallons.

WISER Lawns and Landscapes Workshops continues to educate residents to conserve water quality and quantity, protecting Florida's fragile waters.

PRESENTER BIO: Lisa Sanderson holds a Masters in Agricultural Education and a BS in Horticultural Science from NCSU. Lisa educates new residents on ways to conserve and protect water resources in Sumter County. She reaches clients through weekly newspaper articles, monthly training in person and by webinar, and other educational outreach.