

ENHANCING WATER CONSERVATION AND POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPES THROUGH INDUSTRY EDUCATION

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Residential landscapes impact natural resources as habitat loss decreases biodiversity, irrigation stresses water resources, inappropriate fertilization reduces water quality, and misapplied pesticides harm non-target organisms. While many Floridians are aware of these issues, landscape aesthetics remain prioritized over mitigating their effects. In 2022, UF/IFAS Extension Lake County partnered with the University of Central Florida, the UF/IFAS Program for Resource Efficient Communities, the Nature Conservancy-Florida Chapter, green industry partners, and developers to conduct a research educational session and tour at the annual statewide Outside Collaborative Conference. Our objective was to educate green industry and built-environment professionals about the ongoing efforts to improve soil health to increase irrigation efficiency and biodiversity of pollinators in landscapes. We aimed for 90% of surveyed attendees to self-report increased knowledge. Our team delivered a 90-minute lecture on preliminary research findings of these water-conserving and pollinator-attracting sustainable landscaping efforts. We guided participants through our living laboratory research sites, where we evaluated soil remediation, arthropod food webs, and drought-tolerant landscaping. A Qualtrics survey using a Likert scale was administered to conference attendees two- and six-week post-event. Fifty-six participants completed the survey, with a response rate of 57%. Ninety-six percent of respondents increased their knowledge of development processes, 98% increased their knowledge of sustainable landscaping practices, and 98% percent stated that they were encouraged to contribute to sustainable development and landscaping efforts because of the sessions. Additionally, 83% of forty-one respondents reported that the educational sessions provided new ideas for entrepreneurial opportunities. After the conference, one developer adopted a master-managed landscape plan for 33,000 homes using the methods we discussed. A developer in Nassau County is contemplating the adoption of similar practices, and Lake and Seminole County Commissioners are considering incorporating these approaches in their landscaping codes. Through the adoption of water-efficient and biodiversity-enhancing approaches in residential landscapes, we can mitigate the impact of water use and pave the way for a more sustainable future.

PRESENTER BIO: Brooke Moffis, Commercial Horticulture Agent at UF/IFAS Extension Lake County, specializes in Florida-Friendly Landscaping. With a B.S. in Horticulture from TN Tech, M.S. in Entomology from UF, and ongoing Ph.D. studies, her extensive experience, including work with Walt Disney World, enables her to connect research with landscape solutions for sustainable beauty.