

WATER WEDNESDAY PROGRAM EDUCATES URBAN RESIDENTS ABOUT ACTIONABLE WATER CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Tiare Silvasy¹, Yilin Zhuang², Tina McIntyre³, Morgan Pinkerton³, Krista Stump⁴, Brooke Moffis⁵

¹UF/IFAS Extension Orange County, Orlando, FL, USA

²Mid-Florida Research and Education Center, Apopka, FL, USA

³UF/IFAS Extension Seminole County, Sanford, FL, USA

⁴UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County, Kissimmee, FL, USA

⁵UF/IFAS Extension Lake County, Tavares, FL, USA

Water Wednesday is a collaborative, multi-county extension program that addresses water quality, quantity, and conservation practices. In this program, an agent or specialist from University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) virtually delivered a weekly, fun and fact-based, 45-minute talk on issues pertaining to Florida's water resources. Topics in this water series have ranged from creating your own rain barrel to calibrating your irrigation system and managing your septic system. From May 2019 to June 2021, we conducted 46 webinars with 965 group participants from Zoom and Facebook Live. A retrospective post survey was administered to assess knowledge gain and intent to change behavior. As a result of attending Water Wednesday, respondents (n=179) indicated: 100% improved their understanding of the importance of protecting Florida's water resources, 91% gained knowledge on residential water conservation practices, and 83% improved their awareness of residential water quality protection practices. Respondents also indicated the intent to adopt new practices including: 83% indicated they would reduce the water use in their yard and garden, 75% intended to reduce plastic use, and 100% indicated they would tell others of the importance of protecting water resources. Participant comments included "This was extremely helpful for new Floridians" and "I learned not to overwater my lawn". In a follow-up survey sent in July 2021, 40% of respondents (n=45) indicated they understand better the challenges facing water and 60% claimed they increased their knowledge of water policy. Most participants attended multiple webinars with 60% attending more than one, and almost 10% attending more than 10 webinars. In conclusion, Central Florida residents improved their knowledge of Florida's water issues and actions they can take to benefit water quantity and quality.

PRESENTER BIO: Tia Silvasy is a Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Extension Agent with UF/IFAS Extension. She works on a collaborative team with the Regional Water Specialist and other agents to bring education to Central Florida residents and commercial entities. Collaboratively the team conducts events that address water quality, quantity, and conservation practices.