

SUSTAINABLE YARDS EQUATES TO WILDLIFE HABITAT

For a developed, man-made island, Marco Island is fortunate to have a large diversity of wildlife. Once approximately 6,000 acres of mangroves, the island was developed into over 100 miles of dredged “finger” canals that are fortified with seawalls. As the largest of the 10,000 Islands and surrounded by the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Marco Island benefits from this natural environs that supports furred, finned, feathered and scaled wildlife. Just walking to the mailbox, it is not hard to spot a native species in the neighborhood such as a White Ibis, American Kestrel or Burrowing Owl. Or sitting on a lanai, one may see a Manatee resting in the canal or Bald Eagle fishing for dinner, dipping and skimming the water surface.

Cognizant of the wildlife that lives on the island and that one day all the properties will be built, an effort to provide habitat in your own backyard is important to sustain these populations for generations to come. All grass, a ficus hedge and a hibiscus bush does not make a habitat and may even cost more to maintain. But a sustainable landscape with native species and natural features makes an oasis for wildlife in the midst of urban development. For example, our large population of resident Gopher Tortoises require shrubs for cover, native plants such as Prickly Pear Cactus, Gopher Apple and Beauty Berry for food. Song birds, both resident and migratory, require berries and seeds from such plants as Cocoplum, Jamaican Caper and Sea Grape – all which are excellent native species examples to use instead of a ficus hedge. Not only more interesting in leaf, flower and seed shapes than that of a ficus hedge, these species grow fast, can be hedged (or not) to a desirable shape and provide birds, amphibians and reptiles food and cover. They do provide habitat for native wildlife, but also give the homeowner the opportunity to conserve water, protect water quality, reduce maintenance and chemical use; overall save money.

There are simple ideas to incorporate in your landscape to enhance and create habitat for native animal species but also save money and protect the island’s natural resources for the future. One the most important step is to reduce lawn area. Large areas of sod are like “desert” for our island wildlife. Wildlife requires cover from the elements, nooks and crevices to hide and protect offspring, and food and water sources. Large expanse of lawn does not provide any of these basic needs. Sod also requires irrigation, pesticide and herbicide management and constant maintenance. Removing a quarter to a half of the lawn area in your yard and replacing it with shrubs, flowers, and trees, especially native species, is a huge step towards enhancing wildlife habitat and in turn give you a cost savings. Using the principals of Florida Friendly Landscaping, the right plant in the right place, will reduce water consumption, chemical use and maintenance.

Reduce Lawn Area:

Provide Water Source:

Provide Food Sources:

Provide Cover/Shelter: