

A STATEWIDE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TRAINING PROGRAM THAT PROMOTES URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP IN FLORIDA

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To help minimize the potential nonpoint source loading from inappropriate water, fertilizer and pesticide use in the urban landscape, the UF/IFAS Extension Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, in partnership with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), trains thousands of landscaping professionals statewide through the Green Industries Best Management Practices (GI-BMP) Training Program. The state of Florida requires this training for all landscaping professionals who apply fertilizers. The training program has four main program goals: reducing off-site transport of sediment, nutrients, and pesticides to surface water or groundwater; promoting appropriate site design and plant selection; using appropriate rates and methods for irrigation and fertilizer application; and promoting integrated pest management (IPM) practices. The GI-BMP training includes six learning modules covering efficient use of water and fertilizer, integrated pest management, fertilizer application, and pollution-minimizing lawn and landscape cultural practices. Course delivery is available through several formats, including in-person classes, online and DVD. Courses are available in English and Spanish, with Haitian Creole available through in-person classes. During 2016, a network of some 250 instructors offered 162 in-person classes and, including all teaching formats, 4,051 persons were certified. Since the program's start in 2006, over 48,000 persons received training, with 39,000 of these trainees receiving their GI-BMP certification. Surveys conducted 6 months after each training class assess the extent to which trainees have changed their landscaping behaviors and practices to conserve water and reduce pollutants. These surveys found that, post-training, 93-98% of the attendees used the GI-BMPs on a regular basis and that there was a 26% increase in those who always use the following practices: apply no more than 0.5-0.75 inches (1.27-1.91 cm) water per irrigation event (for water savings of 25-50%); avoid mulching around tree trunks and shrub bases; reset irrigation controls/timers seasonally; reduce fertilizer application; and use integrated pest management.

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