

Compiled by Jane Morse, UF/IFAS Extension, Pinellas County

The Most Common Landscape Planting Mistakes

Mistake #1: Use of invasive plants which are harmful to our environment.

Solution: Unfortunately, invasive plants are still sold in nurseries and many will plant themselves in your yard. Learn which plants are invasive by Googling: Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC). Use Florida native plants. Native plants properly placed will need fewer resources to thrive, and they help to restore Florida's environment and wildlife.

Mistake #2: Over-planting.

Solution: Know the mature size of plants and provide the space needed for them to grow to maturity. Providing proper space for plants will reduce the need for pruning and improve their health. It will save you money because you won't need to buy as many plants, and you won't need to remove plants because they were planted too closely.

Mistake #3: Plants too close to the house.

Solution: Plants should be installed at a distance from the wall that is half the plants mature width plus one foot. Example: A plant that is five feet wide at maturity should be planted three and a half feet from the wall ($1/2$ of the total mature width of the plant plus 1 foot). This spacing will help insulate the house from hot and cold air, allows for termite inspection, house repairs or painting. Also, when plants touch the house, ants and roaches have a bridge to get over the house's foundation insecticidal barrier and come into the house.

Mistake #4: Shrubs around the home are too tall and need constant pruning.

Solution: Select plants that will grow no taller than the height you want (usually the bottom of the windows). Proper selection will greatly reduce the need for shearing to control the plant size. This will save you time and money. Plants will be much healthier when they are not constantly pruned or sheared. Yard waste will be reduced.

Mistake #5: Bright colors are scattered throughout the yard. This looks confusing and isn't pleasing to the viewer.

Solution: Concentrate color in limited focal areas where an accent is desired.

Mistake #6: Lawn areas are cluttered with trees and shrubs. This looks unorganized and creates maintenance problems and grass does not grow well in dense shade.

Solution: Group trees and shrubs in mulched plant beds bordering the lawn.

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The Most Common Landscape Maintenance Mistakes

Mistake #1: Mulch piled against trunk.

Solution: Mulch should be spread out under the canopy of the tree or shrub, not against the trunk. Mulch protects the roots from extremes in temperature, helps to hold in moisture, and helps to suppress weeds which compete for water and nutrients. Organic mulch (anything that was once a plant) provides nutrients for the plant as it decomposes. Keep mulch at least two inches away from the trunk of trees and bushes.

Mistake #2: Over-pruning palms, i.e. “hurricane cuts”.

Solution: Palms are consistently over-pruned or “hurricane cut” and this is very harmful. It is best to leave as many fronds as possible on the palm because they produce its food and protect its bud. The 3 and 9 o’clock positions are the highest levels a palm should be pruned. Yellowing lower leaves usually means a potassium and/or magnesium deficiency, not early frond death. Use the 8-0-12-4Mg fertilizer recommend by UF/IFAS for proper nutrition of palms. Palms with proper nutrition hold more fronds and they stay green until 3-4 days before the frond dies.

Mistake #3: Over-pruning and topping trees.

Solution: Two-thirds of a trees height should remain with a leaf canopy. Limbing up the canopy (removing all branches on the lower 2/3 of the trunk) is damaging and makes the tree more susceptible to wind damage and breakage. Also, the more leaves on a tree the more shade it casts, which reduces cooling costs and saves you money. Trees should NOT be topped. This destroys their structural strength, making them prone to wind damage. It also encourages limb and trunk rot.

Mistake #5: Lawns mowed too low or too infrequently.

Solution: Mow at the right height for the type of grass you have. St. Augustine varieties (non-dwarf) should be mowed at a 3.5 to 4 inch height; Bahia grass at 3 to 4 inch height; Zoysia at 2 to 2.5-inch height and fine textured at 1 inch height. When grass is mowed at the correct height it has more mass and it can recover more quickly from insect, disease or mechanical damage, and helps outcompete weeds. Grass mowed higher has deeper roots and better drought tolerance. Mow often enough so that only 1/3 of the leaf blade is removed.

Mistake #6: Overwatering.

Solution: Only water grass when you see signs of wilt in the morning (leaf blades folded in half, change in color and footprint tracks remain). Only apply ½ to ¾ inch of water. Shrubs and trees should be watered on a separate zone from grass because they don’t need to be watered as often. It is best to water grass early in the morning close to dawn to reduce the risk of disease. Dollarweed is an indicator of over-watering, compacted, or poorly drained soil.

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