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## **Canal Friendly Landscaping**

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For Florida residents, canals are one of our most important neighbors. Canals are the reason that we are able to live in many parts of Florida because they provide drainage and flood control. Since our canals take care of our needs, we should help take care of them.

Living near a canal brings with it a level of landscape maintenance responsibility. The water that flows off our lawns carries things such as grass clippings, leaf and limb litter, soil, fertilizer, and pesticides, which usually end up in the canals. The water that flows through the canals does not get treated, so whatever gets washed or dumped into the canals flows into a larger water body such as the Indian River Lagoon.

Once the debris reaches its destination, the water quality of that water body can be negatively affected. Phosphorus and nitrogen from decaying grass introduce excess nutrients into a water body and decrease water quality by promoting algal growth. Algae blocks out sunlight vital to seagrasses and robs the water of dissolved oxygen, which can lead to fish kills. Loose soil from eroded areas can also be carried through the canals and can smother aquatic plants that provide habitat and dissolved oxygen for our fish and other aquatic wildlife.

In order to keep these negative things from happening to our water bodies, there are some simple landscape practices that can be done to help protect our canals and ultimately, our fragile water bodies.

1. Make sure grass clippings do not blow or get deposited into canals. This practice includes not sweeping or blow grass clippings into the street. The next rainstorm or irrigation can carry them into the canals.
2. Leave grass clippings on the lawn for "grasscycling." Grass clippings are 75 to 85 percent water. When you mow regularly, clippings quickly decompose and release nutrients that fertilize the lawn. Grasscycling can supply about a quarter of the fertilizer needed each season.
3. When fertilizing, leave a Ring of Responsibility along the canal. This is an untreated area. If applying a granular fertilizer with a spreader that has a deflector shield or a liquid fertilizer, the untreated area should extend at least 3 feet from the edge of the canal. If there is no deflector shield on the granular fertilizer spreader, the untreated area should extend at least 10 feet from the edge of the canal.

4. Properly prune trees annually, or more frequently, to reduce storm-generated leaf and limb debris that can interfere with canal function during storms.
5. Cover exposed soil in lawns with mulch, plastic, or other material until landscaping can be done. This will help prevent loose soil from being carried off into the canals.
6. Establish a border of low maintenance plants between the lawn and the canal. These plants will trap loose soil that may flow off the lawn in stormwater runoff.

For more information, please contact your local University of Florida County Extension Service.