

Loving our Landscape_ Why our Landscaping Matters

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SPEAKERS

Michael Dukes, Ricky Telg, Wendy Wilber, Phillip Stokes



Ricky Telg 00:04

This is Science by the Slice, a podcast from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Center for Public Issues Education. In this podcast, experts discuss the science of issues affecting our daily lives, reveal the motivations behind the decisions people make, and ultimately provide insight to solutions for our lives.



Phillip Stokes 00:30

Welcome to Science by the Slice I'm Phillip Stokes, Education Coordinator with the PIE Center. If you could design your dream home, what would it look like? Where would it be? What are your must-haves? In viewing a couple surveys online I found the most desired components of a home include a large kitchen, laundry room, walk-in closet on suites, hardwood floors, garage and outdoor patio. With the exception of the outdoor patio, most people focus on the physical home structure, what's inside the walls, and not necessarily the outdoor space and landscaping. And that's not really a huge surprise. According to the EPA, Americans spend about 90% of their time indoors, so it makes sense that people value indoor home features over planted landscapes. Furthermore, when new homes are built, landscaping is one of the last tasks to be completed and is often viewed as an afterthought. In fact, turf grass is generally the most cost effective way to cover land surfaces after home construction, and that's generally what you see throughout most residential landscapes. Several years back, the PIE Center surveyed Floridians about their views of turf grass and at the time, more Floridians preferred turf grass over native plants, which would be more expensive. So why would builders prioritize higher budgets for landscaping if homeowners do not see the value? I believe that there is a great opportunity to educate homeowners about the value of residential landscapes and the role they play in our lives. I'll give you an example of when the value of our yards was especially apparent. During the COVID-19 pandemic and more specifically, during the times with stricter social distancing measures, people were spending more time at home and investing more in their landscapes. One of the PIE Center's partner programs, the Center for Rural Enterprise Engagement wanted to figure out how many people in the US were growing

food at home. In a nationwide survey they found that 40% of people were growing food at home, and the majority did so for the very first time during the pandemic. Being able to grow food may be one benefit of having a yard, but residential landscapes can also raise property value and the homeowners overall quality of life. So in today's conversation, we're highlighting the suburban lawn. I spoke with two guests Wendy Wilber and Michael Dukes. Wendy Wilber is the Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator with UF/IFAS Extension and Michael Dukes is the Director of the UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency and an irrigation specialist in the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering. In our conversation, we discussed the importance of planting the right plant in the right place, tips for residential irrigation and ultimately why our yards are not an afterthought in our dream homes, but an aspect of the home that deserves attention and care.

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Phillip Stokes 03:37

Michael Dukes and Wendy Wilber thank you so much for joining us on the PIE Center's podcast Science by the Slice. It's a pleasure to have you both here at our site at the University of Florida for an in person interview a lot of ours are online. So this we are face to face, which is great. Today I really wanted to talk about residential landscapes and just the role that they play in our lives. And, you know, landscapes can vary from rural to urban, to you know, big cities and small towns and everything in between. So first off, you know, when do I'll start with you, but of course Michael chime in as well. How do we use our residential landscapes? What did we get from them? What role do they play in our lives?

W

Wendy Wilber 04:20

Right they play a huge role in our lives from urban to rural. The home landscape is used for recreation it is also considered an extra living space. Families, children, dogs, pets, and then it also represents a area that plays a crucial role in making your life more sustainable. So if you want to have edible plantings, fruit trees, vegetables, herb gardens, it all lends to that as well. But there's also environmental benefits from that residential landscape as well. It can reduce the carbon admissions from your area. In fact, we know that a single tree can remove up to 26 pounds have CO2 from the environment. There are some some resources that say that's equal to reducing the emissions of one vehicle that drives 11,000 miles a year. So that's a real benefit. The trees and the shrubs produce oxygen and clean air. They also can buffer from erosion in stormwater runoff. And one of the things that I really like to focus on is that as Florida becomes more and more developed and more and more paved, our residential landscapes represent an area where rainwater can percolate back into the soil and back into the aquifer. So really thinking about how those grass and mulch beds and trees can help with that stormwater runoff reduction. It's, it's quite important. In addition, we know that well landscaped homes have increased property values, up to upwards to 13 to 15% with some statistics. I heard something the other day that a well planted well maintained Live Oak on a lot can increase property values over 20%. But we want to make sure we're always putting the right plant in the right place. Because we know that live oaks are giant trees. So are they really appropriate in an urban lot? Probably not. We also see reduced energy bills from proper plantings as far as shading goes, maybe up to 40% as far as cooling, and if you've ever had a tree, lost a tree in the landscape, and then felt the sun penetrating on that roof, you know, it's pretty hot. And one of my favorite benefits of that residential landscape is the improved quality of life. We know that trees and landscapes have a positive effect on mood and emotional

outlook. And there's even some statistics and research that show a positive outlook and increased memory. And I think we saw this a lot during COVID and the lockdown. People really wanted to be outside and they were spending so much money in garden centers and on their landscapes that we saw a huge spike in, in house plants and people bringing plants inside using that landscape as healing and promoting wellbeing. So I think we knew that before but following the pandemic, you know, we are really seeing the benefits of that landscape and plants on people's lives.

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Phillip Stokes 07:17

Yeah, I mean, those are so many great points, Wendy. And one of the ones I was thinking about as you're talking is, alright, so we were talking about our own properties and our own lawns right before this, but I'll be at my house on a, I don't know, maybe a spring day, and I walk outside and maybe it's a little bit cool or a little bit mild. And then I drive, let's say, a mile down the road to a grocery store, I get out and I am in the paved parking lot. And you can just feel the significant difference when you get out because I do have quite a few trees in my landscape. So I mean, that's, that's something it's, you can feel it, you can see it and you know some of the benefits you can't always know about. But now when it's right there in your face.

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Wendy Wilber 08:01

Well, Dr. Gail Hansen from Environmental Horticulture recently shared a statistic with Michael and I that the heat stroke or heat related deaths are actually high, one of the most highest causes of death from the environmental surroundings. So more so than floods or hurricanes or frostbite. It's that death from heat, heat waves. And you know, we can create landscapes that are cooling and create more, reduce that urban heat sink with trees, it would benefit our communities greatly.

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Phillip Stokes 08:38

Yeah. And I know in the agricultural sector, that's a big concern, of course, heat and for all of the workers that are out in the field. Michael, I want to give you a chance to tell us a little bit more about how you feel residential landscapes play a role in our lives and and really how that impacts your work as well.

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Michael Dukes 08:58

Yeah, well, Wendy really knocked it out of the park with that answer. It just hit on just about every topic that I might have hit on, but she did much better than I would have. You know, from a very basic standpoint, I'm an engineer by training. Landscapes, they prevent erosion. And I am told, that's why we have to have planted landscapes before you can sell a house. That's the main reason why. So they have all these other benefits that Wendy articulated. And through just the way things progress over time, what we have in Florida is essentially these planted landscapes. And when I say landscape, I'm thinking of suburbia, you know, just to make sure we're talking about the same thing. I'm not talking about downtown urban areas. I mean, they have they do have landscapes in those areas, but they're much more modest just due to the

nature of the core of cities developing but these suburban landscapes that we have are they're everywhere. We like I said we have to have them to sell new properties, you must have a everything has to be landscaped. In some states you don't, which is kind of surprising for people that come here. But in any case, we have these landscapes and for the last 20 to 30 years, at least, they are essentially irrigated and planned and designed landscapes. So that's, that's led to all these benefits at Wendy articulated, but it also has led to some side effects, if you want to look at it that way, of lots of water consumption in some areas for these irrigated landscapes and potentially excessive consumption of inputs, such as fertilizers and pesticides.

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Phillip Stokes 10:39

You might know this statistic, but I think I saw something recently that residential landscape water use is around 50% of the entire home water use is that something

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Michael Dukes 10:51

That statistic is thrown out. You know, if you had to boil it down to one number, that's that number is pretty good plus or minus plus, but it really depends on where you're at what time of year to, you know, it varies in space and time. So, it depends in some utilities, it can be much higher than that it can be two thirds to three quarters. Particularly in the spring when it's dry and people are irrigating. So it really depends, but you know, it's a big number.

P

Phillip Stokes 11:17

Yeah. Yeah. And a lot of that is treated water. Right? If it's not from a well, so that's, potable drinking water.

M

Michael Dukes 11:24

if it's if it is if drink, yeah, it could be potable drinking water. A lot of newer developments are, of course, they would like to get reclaimed water if they can, but that's just not logistically possible sometimes. So, yeah, it can can be potable water, and which is basically drinking water. I said, it's extracted from in Florida, for the most part, at least North Florida's extracted from the aquifer, treated to a high degree, and then we use on the landscape.

P

Phillip Stokes 11:52

We put it right back.

W

Wendy Wilber 11:53

It's really ironic, you know, we have these we bottle water in Florida and sell it around the country. And this is the same water that we're putting on our landscapes. It's very valuable resource.

P

Phillip Stokes 12:05

Yeah, a finite resource, right? I do want to, y'all both did a wonderful job, talking about some of those benefits and those ecosystem services that just the land provides for just human life. If you could, and I'll open up for both of you talk about how those might vary from an urban, like an ultra urban city environment to a more rural environment. Because, you know, I know, in a rural environment, you're potentially breaking up, you know, a continuous forest, but then in an urban environment, you have paved lots and houses. And so it's gonna be different, right. So what are some of the, I guess some of the maybe pros and cons that you see in an urban verse rural and that whole continuum?

W

Wendy Wilber 12:55

Well, one of the first things I think about is that those urban and even suburban neighborhoods are set up with a curb and gutter system. And so the stormwater sheets off of their driveways and their roof and then interest a stormwater stream. And taking with it a lot of pollutants, potentially, whether that be nitrogen or other chemicals that might have been applied to the lawn and then that's going to in Gainesville go into our streams, and then ultimately to the aquifer. And then in other areas, it's going to go into a storm water retention pond, potentially pollute that and then ultimately, to the aquifer, and then on the coast, going into the going out into the oceans or the bays. So that's a that that is set up for the water train to move that way. Now, in a residential, more rural lot, you're gonna get a lot more percolation on that lot. Because there isn't any curb and gutter, there might be swales, so you're gonna get that water being recharged in the environment or the aquifer immediately. So I think that that is a positive, but there's also a lot of space and on a rural lot, so really working with homeowners to ask them, how much of this do you want to be high maintenance, and let more of it be natural and be creating habitat for wildlife? And, you know, deliver those ecosystem services out there with trees, etc. So, kind of really focusing their efforts so we're not maintaining a large lot or acreage.

M

Michael Dukes 14:21

Yeah, good point, Wendy. You know, the more urbanized an area is then you have stormwater to deal with because there is more runoff due to the impervious areas. So you have that structure in the rural areas. What I have observed in Florida is you may have a house on five acres but that the immediate area around the house is landscaped and the rest of it is, you know, conservation area if you want to look at it that way or, you know, if it's a if half the lot is treed, then that's just sort of like a natural area. People keep it that way. So and Wendy made a good point that you have that infiltration that then it doesn't run off as much because you do have that pervious area. The other the other point too, as you get more urban, you get more of that heat island effect. And so there is a lot of discussion about land and importance of landscapes in urban areas to help offset that. But you have a limited amount of area for landscaping, because if it is really urban, think of a core of a city, everything's built up, you may have a little bit of landscaping around buildings, but there's a lot of built up spaces.



P

Phillip Stokes 15:27

I was just at a recently a friend's dissertation defense, and he was focusing more on like reptiles, but the impacts of that urban heat effect on even like, like small reptiles like lizards, and how that changes their behavior, and even potentially, their genetics. And so it's the the ripple effects that it can have are just Yeah. Incredible. Wendy, I do want to ask you about the Florida Master Gardener Program. Amazing program, incredible program. And I guess my question is, and feel free to elaborate however you would like but what are some of the common practices and questions that people are coming to IFAS and saying, hey, I want to set this up. I want help with this. I need information on this. What are some of the things you're seeing Floridians really ask about?

W

Wendy Wilber 16:21

Right? So the Master Gardener volunteers, we have over 4000 in the state of Florida. They perform a lot of different roles at their county Extension offices. And one of the main things that they do is run a horticulture Hotline at a plant clinic. And they do get a lot of questions from from Floridians. Many of them are new, and they have no idea where to start. One of my favorite questions that comes in as they move in and they say, all I have is sand. How am I going to grow anything in this? I'm like, well, welcome to Florida. That's what the Master Gardeners say, well, most of Florida is sand, you know very well drained soils, and you can improve those soils or choose the right plant for the right place. So that's kind of a fun one. And then they do a lot of diagnostics, folks coming in with diseases, or insect problems that they are not aware of many times because they aren't putting the right plant in the right place. And then the questions often turn out to be seasonal. So we have in the beginning of the year many questions are about turfgrass, how to fertilize how to water, how to rejuvenate a lawn after a problem. And the master gardeners are able to help with that. And then the reoccurring questions are often about becoming more sustainable in their landscape. You know, how do I What fruit trees are appropriate? Is it time to plant potatoes? What what's you know, what type of tomatoes should I plant? So really helping to troubleshoot and help them plan for a more sustainable landscape? And then of course, we get all kinds of oddball questions about you know, this frozen iguana fell out of the tree, what am I supposed to do with it? And we are here to help and answer with all of those questions. The Master Gardeners are excellent at fielding those questions, and they do the questions sort of work on a wave a rhythm, so we know what to expect, but then there's always the oddball one that we have no clue. You know, and then we have to research it, they always go to IFAS, they know that that's our source. If we if IFAS doesn't have the answer will go to a neighboring land grant university for the answer, but they have to give the most research based up to date unbiased information that they can.

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Phillip Stokes 18:33

Right. Yeah using that ask IFAS website, I know I've heard when I tell people Oh, you know, I work for IFAS. Oh, I, you know, I've used them for you know, making decisions about my yard and things like that. So I know it's it's a really key resource. You know, it's funny. Years ago, I tried to plant citrus, a citrus tree for my grandparents in Daytona, right on like, and they live like, right on the river. It didn't do well. You know, needless to say, you're probably like, well, of course, I should have gone to I mean, I was probably, you know, in college at the time, I didn't know some of these things. But meanwhile, here in Gainesville, on our lot, we have probably two dozen citrus trees or something. So knowing some of those things, and of course, knowing

about some of the pests, and things that can impact them. So all of those resources are there. Wendy, you also mentioned that a lot of questions you get are from new Floridians, and a lot of which are probably moving into newer developments. And so Michael, I do want to ask you a little bit about how developers make landscaping choices when they are creating a neighborhood a community. And so because people move in and they have the shrubs there, they have the turf grass and they have whatever trees they the developers decided to plant. And so thinking about what type types of information are they using when they make this decision? And I know with CLUE, you work a lot with developer. So tell us a little bit about that. It's a big topic area I know.

M

Michael Dukes 20:08

Indeed it is. Well, it starts way, upstream way before the development. Those questions are asked. And, you know, developers will do, they'll do a market study, they'll target a demographic, you know, maybe it's a 55 plus community here in Florida, maybe it's a mixed community. We're seeing communities now in Central Florida that are sort of an eco type of community that they're, they're trying to, essentially sell to future customers. So they'll do analyses like that, in many, many cases, at least in the last couple of decades, though, and probably still now, you know, landscapes are economics driven. You have a lot of components into a development, many things that have to be done, like the stormwater infrastructure, the roads and things like that. The housing product, you know, we all look at that. And we're like, yeah, man, that's a really nice house, I want the granite countertops, I want all this. And the landscaping and irrigation always comes at the end. In some cases, maybe many cases, there's this thing called Value Engineering at the end, where, you know, you kind of have a plan, and then that, well, we have to cut the budget here, because we spent more over here that that happens in our landscapes. So you end up getting a product at least in recent history, there are some new developments that are diverging from this in recent history, they have to cover the entire soil area with plants or something could be much too. But that ends up being has ended up being largely turf, because turf grass is the most economic way to cover that surface. And then they all have some assortment of ornamentals and or a tree, you know, depending on their design. So that's very, very typical, all of it irrigated. So it really does boil down to the economics at the end of the day. But we are seeing in some new developments where in Central Florida, where there are significant water constraints. And we we know those water constraints are going to continue for the coming decades, developers are trying some new things. They're trying some more efficient irrigation equipment, they're trying landscapes that are undoubtedly, they're more expensive, because they're filled with ornamental different types of ornamentals, that the idea being once they are established, then those ornamentals will require much, much less water. It's going to be interesting to see how it turns out. Because there is another component of that. And that's education, and what what homeowners understand about their landscape. So I'm, I'm excited to see that and a little bit nervous at the same time.

W

Wendy Wilber 22:49

So we do have low impact development, this concept of that going, going in a few shining examples where we see clusters of the residential areas, and more common space and then leaving acres and acres for conservation. There's a couple of developments like that in Central Florida, Florida going on. And but it really boils down to that economics. And I and, Phil, it's

interesting, because you know, \$1 makes a huge difference to these developer developers, because they're multiplying it over so many homes, but there are, there are ways to be more sustainable in those developments. And I think IFAS is doing a good job at working with developers, but we can do we should reach so many more.

P

Phillip Stokes 23:35

Yeah. So what are I mean, some of those, I guess, we call them Florida friendly landscaping techniques, some things that if a developer's listening, or just anyone, some good practices for a landscape that would really add to some of those ecosystem services that we've already discussed?

W

Wendy Wilber 23:57

But I think it really boils boils down to putting the right plant in the right place for the maintenance level of the homeowner, right. So really thinking about reducing high maintenance landscapes, creating landscapes that are more water efficient, and making plant choices that are low maintenance. And so if they if why put in a shrub that wants to be 10 feet tall, if you're putting an under a want a window that is four feet tall and has to keep pruning, better off to use a more dwarf plant for that situation, Why put turf into an area of the yard that's never going to be used? And so that's irrigated turf, that's just sort of it's it's not efficient to do it that way. So maybe that's more of an area for a mulch bed or a natural area that would provide trees and shrubs for birds and other animals. And then the design of the turf palette itself. So if you are going to have turf, make sure that the strips are wide enough to be mowed. So sometimes you'll see just a little strip of grass that's maybe a foot wide. It's your irrigated so there's a lot of overspray. And then you're mowing that. And sometimes they default to weed eating that which is terrible for the health of the grass. So those are a few ideas. And then creating larger mulch beds with shrubs that would be able to use low volume irrigation as opposed to a turf that might be using high volume irrigation. But there's also some very exciting, exciting advancements that's that are happening at IFAS. Dr. Kevin Kenworthy is breeding grasses that are going to be very drought tolerant, and so needing less irrigation, and still having a very high quality look to it. So maybe Michael wants to talk a little bit more about that.

M

Michael Dukes 25:47

Yeah, I was gonna we, in fact, we just had a meeting, the past couple of days where we were talking about these things. So this is really good timing. You know, it's, there's, there's things you can do right now. And that's to the landscape design, right plant right place. In my mind, it would be really, if there are developers out there listening, if we could crack this problem of, okay, a lot of our we know how to design landscapes that are very resilient over time once they're established, but they do need irrigation for establishment much of the time. So if if we could figure that part out, it doesn't make sense to spend a lot of money on the irrigation infrastructure, if you're then going to turn it off in six months. So if if we could crack that nut, I think we can make a lot of progress. But in the meantime, to Wendy's point, you know, more efficient irrigation technologies, because we've time after time, we've worked with homeowners, they're IFAS specialists who've done studies and people just don't understand

how to irrigate, there's a lot of mixed messages. They often homeowners, they'll see something and they'll think, oh, not enough water, so I'll just turn it up. But we do have water restrictions around the state that people should be following. That's an attempt to move the use of water in a more reasonable direction. But there are irrigation technologies, as Wendy talked about earlier, micro irrigation are also called low volume irrigation that can be used, that can lead to much less water applied than high volume or sprinkler irrigation. It doesn't really make sense to sprinkle irrigate this landscape bed that has plants that are three or four feet apart. Because you're worrying a lot of area, that's not even the plants won't even utilize, certainly not when they're young. Other technologies like pressure regulation, and smart irrigation controllers, those are either they're referenced by Florida friendly and other programs like Florida Water Star, but they're not I wouldn't say those, those are mainstream, they do cost more. So back to the back to the cost point of it. But another piece of this, that's still going to be important. And that's the education. And that's what we do in IFAS Extension. You know, you can give a homeowner these tools, but if they're not educated about that, those technologies and techniques, then you're probably not going to get the result that you you want it in the first place.

W

Wendy Wilber 28:05

Yeah, it makes me think about my mother-in-law in the villages who had a soil moisture sensor in her garage, and it was limiting the amount of water that she was putting out. And she said there was no information about it anywhere in the house, or even over, you know, at the location where the box was, and she said, help me cut this off. I don't want it. And I was like, No, Marcia, this is really going to provide efficient irrigation for your landscape. They've set it up for the right way. And she said, cut it off. And I said I will not.

P

Phillip Stokes 28:38

So you're asking the wrong person.

W

Wendy Wilber 28:40

You're asking the wrong person.

P

Phillip Stokes 28:43

And even like, you know, thinking about you know, turf grass, right, in the winter, it goes more dormant, dormant, right? So you don't need to do much to it. And it's not going to be super green. But it sounds like maybe that's what people want. And so there's some I don't know engineering to try to figure out how to make grass green even in the winter. I don't know.

M

Michael Dukes 29:05

Well, I a lot of that comes back to the climate we're in you know, in central Florida. With the winters if they're not very severe, then if you do irrigate in the winter, which the grass doesn't really need it, it will stay green, it'll stay warmer, the surface stay warmer and you can get that

really need it, it will stay green it'll stay warmer, the surfaces stay warmer and you can get that green effect all winter long. A lot of times you know, I guess if people realize that yeah, it goes brown is fine, we'll come back. But I don't know how many people want that. I don't even know if they know that.

W

Wendy Wilber 29:35

I think it's an unrealistic expectation to have green grass through the winter if you're if you live north of Orlando. So we have watering restrictions to reflect that also from the water management districts as well as local municipalities. So I think educating people about what to expect people moved to Florida and maybe the the places that they've been our resorts and Disney World and they expect that Look in their home landscape, and it's just not realistic.

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Phillip Stokes 30:02

Right. What you just said there? I mean, unrealistic expectations and like, what are what really should we be expecting? And there? Is that kind of status quo, keeping up with the Joneses. Do it making decisions because my neighbor did it, or I've seen it on TV or whatever at Disney World, honestly. Yeah, I think that could be those all of those things together. It's yeah. So so how, you know, thinking about people, you know, say, well, keep it to Florida, you know, how do you approach home owners, you know, people that maybe already have established landscapes, what are those? We've already talked about some tips, but just maybe more of like, the simple things. Because a lot of times people are really busy. And their landscape is kind of like an afterthought. You know? So what are like the simple tips? And what have you found to be some of the most impactful ways of addressing that and educating people?

W

Wendy Wilber 31:02

Well, for me, it's a multi pronged approach, because what appeals to you may not appeal to the next person. So we have to think about selling our concept of Florida friendly landscaping and a few different ways, you know, is it going to save you time? So you may be very busy and you want to save time? Is it going to improve your environment? You know, are we doing the right thing? Is it going to save you money? So we have to kind of hit all those concepts and get people thinking, you know, pick the one that is going to resonate with you and make the most sense. For me right now, it's saving time. So I don't want to spend a lot of time out in the landscaping, pruning, mowing, mulching, watering, so, but it may, for somebody else, it might be a bit be about the money in the inputs, they don't want to pay that lawn service \$100 a month, so can I help to them to design a landscape, that would be a lower maintenance, and so or maybe their water bill is high, and they want to help reduce that. So I think, you know, trying to find what resonates with that homeowner for why they would want to adopt this program. And that's, that's for the people who care, Phil, there's other people who have this, you know, it's green, the yard is green, the shrubs are green, and the house is blue. And that's all I care about. So we have to try to appeal to them in a different way to kind of get them excited about or interested in caring about their landscape and how it impacts the environment and how it impacts their life.



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M Michael Dukes 32:36

So a little bit about the irrigation, simple things, turn your irrigation system on once a year, during the daylight hours and look at it. It's not rocket science, you know, is it putting water where it should be putting water? Is there a head that's blown off and shooting up in the air? And by the way, it's been doing that for six months? Or maybe longer? You know, simple, you don't have to be an expert to realize that, yeah, you know, it's what I have is doing the best it can do. Now, what you have may not be the best, but is it working up to its potential. And you do that through a visual inspection, you can do that yourself, it's real easy to do. You can call people out that will do it for a fee. So that's number one. Just do that. For your irrigation. Most people irrigation is a tool. It's like a hammer. You know, there are different hammers, but most people don't care because it's a tool. So just do that one thing. And then after that you can you can go up the level of complexity. Is your timer program properly? Are you running an A and a B program that you didn't know about? So you're actually getting double the water, things like that. And then after that, you can go up to pressure compensation, smart controllers, more irrigation design things where well maybe I don't need a sprinkler in this bed. Maybe I need drip irrigation there. But at first step, just look at your system. Is it? Is it putting water where it should?

W Wendy Wilber 33:58

I got a call from a woman in Gainesville a few years back. And she was having a rotted spot on her house. And she thought she couldn't understand it. Where was it coming from? Well, we suggested that maybe her neighbor's irrigation was shooting at her house and it had been for the last year. So her wooden siding was rotting away from the direct spray of water. And so no one had gone out and and evaluated the system in quite a long time. And she was losing a piece of siding off of her house.

P Phillip Stokes 34:31

That's that's a funny story. And yeah, I mean, these are that's a simple thing you can do just look at your irrigation. And Wendy what you said, you know, very poignant statement that's for the people who care when you're talking about like people who are really like making decisions. But there are a simple things like that who just want the green. You know, they probably care enough to make sure that their their irrigation system is is working the way it should be and yes, not rotting their neighbor's house.

W Wendy Wilber 35:02

Sometimes it boils down to the HOA letter too, right? That's another motivation. The HOA is saying that your landscape does not keep in, keep with the rest of the neighborhood's not keeping up with the Joneses. And we need you to mow and we need you to make sure that those trees or shrubs are replaced. And so that is another motivator. Yes, keeping up with the social norms, but that letter from the HOA finding out that they're gonna get a fine until they do something that will motivate folks in a big hurry.

M Michael Dukes 35:31

Or from the county or the utility. You know, actually, some of our central Florida utilities there, they've kind of pivoted the way they approach it. And if someone if there's a complaint about watering on the wrong day, or something like that, they'll use that. And sometimes with IFAS Extension folks, local folks, as a as a way in as an education opportunity for that homeowner, instead of giving them a fine right away, they'll say, Hey, how can we help you? And they've noticed that they get a better response from people with the carrot rather than the stick?

P

Phillip Stokes 36:00

Sure. Well, I do want to just open it up, if there are any last comments or things we didn't touch on. I know, like we said at the beginning, it's a big topic. And this is just a, you know, scratch on the surface. But yeah, any other any other topics. I will say before that, you know, Wendy, when you were saying about saving time, you know, one thing I was also thinking about is how getting out in the landscape getting out in your yard, if you're fortunate enough to have one. It's very cathartic. And it's like kind of takes us back to our roots, you know, of those agrarian roots, you're working with your hands. And that's a lot of I think, in the pandemic, we saw a lot of that, but I know I find that I don't always have time to do it. But it is, I always feel so much better when I'm out doing something, you know, in the landscape.

W

Wendy Wilber 36:55

I like to think about I, when I teach landscaping, I say you know, you have that hammock, you have that chaise lounge out there, if you're spending more time on the mower, and behind the pruners instead of sitting in that chair enjoying it, then you probably need to reevaluate your landscape. Because we want people to to do the work, but also to not have it feel like it's overwhelming, because they you really do need to enjoy that residential landscape. One of the things that I would encourage people to do is to connect with their local county extension office to go to classes, engage with the Master Gardener volunteers, get if you have children, get them involved in 4H programs, because we have a wealth of resources, and really do provide solutions for people's lives to improve people's well being through IFAS. So I would encourage folks to get out to the extension office, if at all possible.

P

Phillip Stokes 37:44

That's great. That's great.

M

Michael Dukes 37:46

My take away turn your irrigation system on once a year and just look at during the daylight. That would just take care of so many problems. Yeah. And if you want to move up that chain I mentioned, you know, County Extension can get you started there.

P

Phillip Stokes 38:01

And I will say this in the show notes of the podcast, we'll be sure to include links. And so if there

are any things you would like to share any EDIS documents or those electronic data documents, any any other things that would be pertinent to everything we've been talking about today, you know, we can we can work on that. But also if you want to share any of those as well. Certainly can as well.

W

Wendy Wilber 38:25

Well, the Florida friendly landscaping program has a wealth of information and great places to get started. They have a beautiful handbook that tells you with the nine principles and how to incorporate those nine principles into your residential landscape. And then a list of over 400 plants that are considered Florida friendly and are very easy and appropriate to grow in Florida. So that Florida friendly landscaping program is excellent for that. And then the other thing is Florida friendly landscaping provides the green industry best management practice training. And if you are hiring a landscape professional, it is a good idea to make sure that they have been trained in the green industry best management practices. This is a licensure or a certificate that comes from the Department of Agriculture as well as from the Environmental Protection Department in Tallahassee. So you want to make sure if you have contracted your landscaping, chores away to service that they are trained and certified.

P

Phillip Stokes 39:22

That's a really good point. Really good tip. Yeah. Well, great. Well, Michael Dukes and Wendy Wilber, thank you so much for being on the PIE Center's podcast Science by the Slice. It was so fun, and I hope we'll be able to catch up again soon.

M

Michael Dukes 39:34

Thank you.

W

Wendy Wilber 39:35

Sure. Thank you.

R

Ricky Telg 39:38

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