New Year resolutions to improve your landscape

With the excitement of a new year you may be thinking about making resolutions for 2008. But have you ever thought to make a resolution to improve your landscape? Here are a few resolutions that you may want to make for 2008.

Resolve to remove the grass under your trees and put down a ring of organic mulch.

Mowing equipment and string trimmers can damage trees if used improperly. Repeated wounding of tree trunks allows entry points for disease and insect infestations.

Replacing the grass around the base of trees with mulch provides a buffer zone. The larger the mulched area, the less the turf near the tree is stressed by shade, the more room the lawn mower has to maneuver with ease, and the less the string trimmer needs to be used.

Resolve to conserve water in the landscape. Saving water in the landscape is easy and can be accomplished in a number of ways.

One way is to use drought-resistant plants. Once established, these plants require less water than others, usually surviving on rainfall alone. Many drought-resistant plants are also Florida natives and easy to grow.

Another way to conserve water is to water plants only when necessary, especially turf. Overwatering can result in shallow root systems and disease problems. It is best to wait until the turf begins to show drought signs before watering.

A rain sensor on your automatic irrigation system also conserves water. It's an inexpensive device that shuts off your irrigation system when it rains. Not only are newly installed irrigation systems required to have one, but they also can help save plants from becoming overwatered.

Resolve to plant the "right plant, in the right place." Sensible selection of plant materials based on some knowledge of the plant is always best.
For example, a shade-loving plant will not do well in a full-sun site. A plant that requires a somewhat drier environment may rot in a site regularly watered to excess. A tree that may grow up to 60 foot tall and over 100 feet wide would not be a good choice planted next to a house.

Resolve to use pesticides properly! The key to the proper use of a pesticide is making sure to read the label. The label is the law!

The pesticide label is a legal document that must be followed to the letter. The label gives you a wealth of information such as which pests it will control, what hosts it can be applied to, how to mix the chemical, when it should be applied, how much and how often and how to protect yourself and the environment.

And remember, more is NOT always better. Pesticide labels will clearly state the recommended amount of product to use. Using more may negatively impact the effectiveness of the pesticide.

Resolve to get to know your bugs, especially good bugs.

Good bugs can also be called beneficial insects. Beneficial insects are all around us and help maintain the balance of nature as it relates to insect pests in and around our landscape.

The last resolution to ponder for 2008 is to contact your local Extension Office when you have a landscape problem. The University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service is a free service that provides information backed by research conducted at the university. Call us with your plant questions.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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