

BMPs – What Are They?

BMPs, or Best Management Practices, are becoming a way of life for anyone involved in a profession that utilizes fertilizers, pesticides, or irrigation water. BMPs recommend how and what fertilizers should be used in particular situations. They offer information on how and when to use pesticides most effectively and with the least negative environmental impact. BMPs also provide insight into minimum water requirements in all phases of plant growth, weather, and soil conditions. All of this information is based on accumulated scientific research and data.

The state of Florida has directed several government departments to work together to find ways to reduce pollution in our waters. Even though the use of BMPs are not yet mandatory, the coalition formed by the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and Water Management Districts recognizes that BMPs are our best means of insuring clean water and sustainability for the future.

There are specific BMPs that have been developed to assist in different crop productions in all types of growing conditions throughout the state. But agriculture is not the only source of excess nitrogen and phosphorus, two main water contaminants. With a continued influx of new Florida residents, development and housing will continue to expand. Along with this growth come more contaminants from lawn and landscape fertilizers, pesticides and sediments.

As homeowners, we have the same responsibilities as agriculture in managing and protecting our resources. We also use fertilizers, pesticides, and irrigation water on our properties. We should stop the selfish practices of overwatering, over fertilizing, and overusing herbicides and insecticides, and start paying attention to the needs of the environment. BMPs have been developed to help us use these inputs in a way that will provide us with the results we want in the landscape, but without jeopardizing the natural resources that we must protect.

These are the nine principles that have been developed by UF Florida-Friendly Landscaping as BMP's for homeowners. Plan your landscaping around these principles and protect our Florida waters.

1. *Right plant, right place.* Select plants that are suited for a particular site. They will require minimal water, fertilizers and pesticides.
2. *Water efficiently.* Irrigate only when the lawn needs water. Learn the signs.
3. *Fertilize appropriately.* Learn recommended amounts for lawn and ornamentals. Plants can't use nutrients that have moved below the root zone.
4. *Mulch.* A 3-inch layer helps retain moisture and keeps weeds down.
5. *Attract wildlife.* Wildlife is attracted to plants that provide food and shelter in your yard.
6. *Manage yard pests responsibly.* Be informed about the pest and pesticide before spraying.
7. *Recycle.* Leave grass clippings on the lawn. Leaves can be used as mulch.
8. *Reduce stormwater runoff.* Slow down the movement of water so it can soak into the ground.
9. *Protect the waterfront.* Minimize the chance of pollutant runoff into water bodies.

Several links to superb guidebooks can be found at the website <http://floridayards.org> A well written guide that is worth your time is "What You Need to know About Fertilizing and Watering Your Lawn and Landscape to Protect Florida's Springs". A rather wordy title for such a good how-to publication. The Master Gardeners are available to help you with gardening questions. Give them a call at 752-5384. (*Published 12-6-09*)