Seven Steps to Creating a Florida Yard

1. Assessing What You Have and Need
   - Make an inventory of the positive things you like about your yard and the negative things that displease you.
   - Sketch a bird’s-eye view of your property. Include property and utility lines as well as decks, patios, driveways, walkways and pools.
   - Next, add into your drawing existing trees or other plants that you want to keep.
   - Then, decide how much living space and what activities will take place in your yard. Think of children’s play areas, dog runs, barbecues.

2. Plant Placement
   - Take a piece of tracing paper and place it over your property sketch. Now, add additional features to your landscape that you might like. Make sure you are leaving adequate space for your plants to grow. Do at least a couple of these in order to give yourself some options.
   - Keep three key elements in mind:
     - The site conditions.
     - The function the feature will serve.
     - How much maintenance will be required.
       (How much time do you want to spend in your yard each week?)
   - Place trees and shrubs together in plant beds according to their water, light and moisture requirements.
   - Place trees where they will shade and cool your home.

3. Site Modification
   - Determine if there are low areas that collect water and need to be filled.
   - If this appears to be a big job, either add fill only to specific areas where you will be planting or select plants that will tolerate standing water.
   - Determine the acidity of alkalinity level of your soil. Don’t attempt to modify the pH with lime or sulfur.
   - If you have decided to add walkways or driveways, consider using pavers, bricks, gravel, rocks or porous concrete that will not shed water off your landscape.
   - If you are reshaping your property, include swales or retention areas that will allow water to be held on-site until it can percolate into the soil.
4. **Plant Selection**
   ✽ Do a little research before you purchase plants to insure they will survive in the soil, light and moisture conditions of your landscape. Ideally, you should be choosing plants that will have low maintenance needs after they have become established in your landscape. Look for slow to moderate growth habits and drought tolerance. If you live near the ocean, make sure your selections are salt tolerant.
   ✽ Select plants that will attract butterflies and birds. Many native species provide a food and shelter source of wildlife. Choose plants that produce flowers, berries or seed.

5. **Irrigation Design or Retrofit**
   ✽ Install a rain shut-off device or moisture meter to avoid wasting water.
   ✽ Turf areas should be irrigated separately from shrub areas. Turf areas are usually irrigated using rotor heads and shrubs using stationary spray heads. If they are combined on the same zone, shrub areas will receive too much water.
   ✽ If your landscape is hand-watered, use a rain gauge to tell you when not to water.

6. **Purchasing Plants**
   ✽ Look carefully at your plants before you buy them! They should exhibit these characteristics:
     ✽ Vigor and good color.
     ✽ A well-developed root system with no encircling roots.
     ✽ No weeds in the soil.
     ✽ No signs of insects or disease.
     ✽ Trees with single trunks.
   ✽ It is always a good idea to buy from a reputable grower that will stand behind their plant material. Good $$$ deals on plants may require accepting substandard material, usually causing problems in the long term.
   ✽ Remember, the goal of environmentally-friendly landscaping is to establish plants that require a minimal amount of long-term maintenance. This goal is harder to reach if you are starting out with inferior plant material.

7. **Planting and Establishment**
   ✽ When planting trees of shrubs, dig a hole two or three times wider than the root ball and only as deep as the root ball. Planting too deep can be fatal to your plants!
   ✽ Backfill the planting hole with the same type of soil that you dug out. Don’t bother trying to add soil amendments such as peat or compost. Research has shown that there is no long-term benefit to this practice.
   ✽ Construct a water ring over the root ball, not beyond it. Maintain constant water to the root area, but don’t saturate it. Be prepared to water newly planted material on a daily basis, if necessary, to maintain adequate moisture. Research has shown that providing adequate moisture during the establishment phase of creating your landscape will make it more drought-resistant later on.
   ✽ Stake trees if they are unsteady, but use string or biodegradable plastic to secure to the stake. This practice will avoid trunk girdling if you forget to untie the tree.
   ✽ A good rule of thumb is that trees need six to twelve months per inch of trunk diameter in order to become established.
   ✽ One-gallon shrubs need six months and three-gallon shrubs need about one year to become established.
   ✽ Sod requires one month to become established, while sprigs and plugs need about three months.