



More than 30 percent of Sarasota County's land is set aside as public land for the preservation of green space, wildlife and native plants, clean water, clean air, the restoration of natural habitats, and nature-based recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Our natural areas include state parks, water management district lands, city and county parks, and environmentally sensitive lands.

Although our public lands are managed by government agencies, their stewardship depends upon the cooperation of residents and visitors, especially nearby property owners. This pamphlet shows homeowners how to be neighbors to nature.



## Get Involved

Many of Sarasota County's publicly-owned natural areas depend heavily upon volunteers, and many of the volunteer opportunities are educational. If you would like to become involved, please contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for **Volunteer Sarasota County**.

To pitch in and join a neighborhood cleanup, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for **Keep Sarasota County Beautiful**.

Photographs by: Steve Freedman, Fran Palmeri,  
Nancy Edmondson and Annemarie Post



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SARASOTA BAY  
ESTUARY PROGRAM  
Restoring Our Bay

### Natural Lands and Parks locations:

Sarasota County Natural Lands  
<http://www.scgov.net/NaturalLands>

Sarasota County Parks

<http://www.scgov.net/ParksandRecreation/Parks>

### For more information contact:

Sarasota County Natural Resources  
or  
UF/IFAS Sarasota County Extension  
941-861-5000

### Project Direction:

Annemarie Post, UF/IFAS Sarasota County Extension and  
Nancy Edmondson, Sarasota County Natural Resources

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# neighboring nature

a guide for property owners

# what you can do!

## Protect and Enhance Natural Areas

Exotic plants are plants that are not native to Florida. Invasive exotic plants are those that have spread into natural areas, often replacing native plants and reducing our native plant and animal diversity. Sometimes, invasive exotics can increase fire hazards and impede natural water flow; they can also contribute to an increase in mosquitoes.

- When landscaping or gardening, remove invasive exotics and create natural corridors of plants that connect bordering properties. Animals use these corridors to travel from one natural area to another, which in turn benefits wildlife on a larger neighborhood scale.
- The University of Florida's Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program promotes and teaches ways to plant and maintain your yard. For local advice on Florida-friendly landscaping, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for the **UF/IFAS Sarasota County Cooperative Extension Service**, or visit <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu>.
- To learn which exotics pose a threat to our natural areas and which do not, and for help identifying plants you do not recognize, call 861-5000 and ask for the Extension Service Help Desk. Information about invasive exotics can also be found at the UF/IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas (<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment>) and the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council's list of nuisance exotic plants ([www.fleppc.org](http://www.fleppc.org)).



## Help Protect Wildlife.

Sarasota County's diverse animal wildlife includes several threatened species, like the Florida scrub-jay, gopher tortoise and eastern indigo snake. Help protect our native wildlife by respecting natural habitat.

- Don't let pets roam free. Sarasota County's leash law applies to cats and dogs and requires that they be on a leash when off your property. Only certain parks allow pets. Contact the Sarasota County **Call Center: 941-861-5000** for a list of dog parks in Sarasota County. Report violations to **Animal Services: 941-861-9500**.
- Do not dump aquarium plants or fish into local waterways or leave nuisance animals on public lands.
- Feral hogs and cats have invaded Southwest Florida's natural areas. Stray cats are a primary predator of the federally threatened Florida scrub-jay. Pythons, iguanas, and other exotic wildlife are recent arrivals that prey upon and displace native wildlife. Report exotic reptiles in natural areas to the Sarasota County **Call Center: 941-861-5000**. Report stray cats and dogs to **Animal Services: 941-861-9500**.
- Hunting is not permitted on Sarasota County-owned properties, but recreational fishing is allowed in many areas. Please observe all state fishing regulations, which can be found online ([www.floridaconservation.org](http://www.floridaconservation.org)).

## Respect Property Boundaries.

- Dumping household trash or yard waste on public land is illegal. It creates fire hazards and contributes to the spread of invasive plants. Report dumping inside Sarasota County to the Sarasota County **Call Center: 941-861-5000**.
- Store personal possessions on your own property.
- Be sure that any home improvement and landscaping projects are within your property boundaries and not within public lands.

# ...tips for neighbors

## Report Suspicious Activity.

- Many public lands are open to the public only during posted hours. Motor traffic and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are not permitted. If you observe unauthorized access or suspicious activity, please call the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office **Neighborhood Watch: 941-316-1201**.

## Providing Good Public Land Stewardship

Sarasota County employs many different strategies to ensure that natural properties maintain healthy and safe environments.

Before the growth of Florida's human population, lightning started fires that swept across thousands of acres every spring, creating an open, diverse and disease-free forest. Many of our natural landscapes and plant communities remain dependent on fire for their continued survival.

But today, we reduce the wildfire threat to homes and property by reducing the fire-fueling vegetation, through mechanical means such as timber thinning or by controlled burns carried out during prescribed conditions. Here's how you can help:

- Support prescribed fire in local conservation areas. Controlled burns are scheduled to minimize smoke and ash in residential areas.
- Burning trash or yard waste is not permitted in Sarasota County.
- Adopt FIREWISE landscaping techniques around your home ([www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org)).

