

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Ideas: Top 5 Drought-Resistant Perennials

Florida-Friendly Landscaping

So what exactly is Florida-Friendly Landscaping? It is an integrated approach to landscaping developed by the University of Florida that allows homeowners to design, install, and maintain attractive and environmentally friendly landscapes.

The 9 principles of Florida-friendly landscaping are:

- Choosing the right plant for the right place
- Fertilizing appropriately
- Attracting wildlife
- Recycling yard waste
- Protecting the waterfront
- Watering efficiently
- Using mulch in plant beds
- Managing yard pests responsibly
- Reducing storm water runoff

Perennials

Now that you understand the concept of Florida-friendly landscaping, let's define a perennial. Perennials are plants that grow indefinitely. The shrubs and trees that comprise our landscapes are perennials, but these are referred to as woody perennials. Most flowering plants are herbaceous perennials -- plants with little or no woody tissue. However, under the continuous growing conditions of central Florida, some herbaceous perennials become woody shrubs. Likewise, plants that are normally woody shrubs in south Florida behave as herbaceous perennials in north Florida where they are killed to the ground each winter.

Flowering perennials can provide color in your landscape during every season of the year. Once established, these plants require less maintenance than annual flowers, and they have the advantage of being a more permanent part of your landscape. The following are some particularly tough, colorful, and drought-resistant perennials for Central Florida landscapes.

Florida-Friendly Perennials

<p>Variegated flax lily (<i>Dianella tasmanica variegata</i>)</p> <p>Optimal Light: Sun Mature Height: 1ft-3ft Light Range: Full Sun – Shade Mature Spread: 1ft-3ft Soil Moisture: Well-drained Soil Texture: Any Salt Tolerance: Med Florida Native: No Florida Region: N, C, S Hardiness Zone: 8-11</p>		<p>Variegated flax lily is a great Florida-friendly choice for a low vertical growing perennial ground cover over many other types of border grasses. It uses less water, has fewer pest problems and performs well under water stress. It is frequently grown for its attractive, variegated iris-like foliage. This plant may re-seed, and tends to develop scale insect problems in the shade. Plant in sunny areas and enjoy!</p>
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Porterweed (*Stachytarpheta sp.*)

Optimal Light: Sun
Mature Height: 3ft-5ft
Light Range: Full/Part Sun
Mature Spread: 3ft-5ft
Soil Moisture: Well-drained
Soil Texture: Any
Salt Tolerance: High
Florida Native: No
Florida Region: C, S
Hardiness Zone: 9-11
Color: Year-round



Porterweed is one of the best butterfly attractors. It blooms year-round and sprouts back quickly from frost and freeze. Plants grow about 4' tall by 6' wide before stems droop and touch the ground. Pruning is the best way to keep the plant in check. It re-blooms quickly after pruning during warm months. Flowers are borne terminally on long, stringy spikes at the ends of the stems. Some varieties are Florida natives, but all are American natives.

Society garlic (*Tulbaghia violacea*)

Optimal Light: Sun
Mature Height: 2ft
Light Range: Full Sun – Shade
Mature Spread: 2ft
Soil Moisture: Well-drained
Soil Texture: Sandy
Salt Tolerance: Low
Florida Native: No
Florida Region: N, C, S
Hardiness Zone: 7-11



Society garlic is a clump-forming herbaceous perennial with large clusters of lavender or lilac flowers. The leaves grow straight up out of a swollen underground rhizome. It blooms sporadically from early summer until late fall. The leaves and rhizomes smell like garlic, but the flowers are sweet-smelling. Society garlic is easy to grow in light, sandy soils. It does best in full sun and will grow in shade, but may not flower much. Established plants can survive extended droughts.

Devil's backbone (*Pedilanthus tithymaloides*)

Optimal Light: Sun
Mature Height: 2ft-3ft
Light Range: Full Sun – Shade
Mature Spread: 2ft-3ft
Soil Moisture: Well-drained
Soil Texture: Any
Salt Tolerance: High
Florida Native: No
Florida Region: C, S
Hardiness Zone: 9-11
Color: Year-round



Devil's Backbone is a succulent that adds bright contrast to green or colorful landscapes and requires very little care after establishment. It is tender to frost and freeze, but usually re-sprouts from the roots. This plant is moderately salt tolerant. The flowers, shaped like slippers, are only open at the tip. The stigma and anthers extend beyond the brightly colored petals. Most *Pedilanthus* are pollinated by hummingbirds. Plant in mass groupings for the best effect in the landscape.

Muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*)

Optimal Light: Sun
Mature Height: 2 ft-5ft
Light Range: Full/Part Sun
Mature Spread: 2-3 ft.
Soil Moisture: Well-drained - Wet
Soil Texture: Sandy
Salt Tolerance: High
Florida Native: Yes
Florida Region: N, C, S
Hardiness Zone: 8-11
Color: Fall



Purple Muhly Grass is a showy clumping perennial grass that grows 3' to 4' high and forms clumps 3' to 4' in diameter. This native grass flowers in the fall with the dried flower stalks remaining on the plant until spring. The plant adapts to most any sunny location and is becoming increasingly popular. It is completely drought tolerant and hardy throughout the state. Use it in non-irrigated areas or where supplemental water is not readily available.