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South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

10 resolutions to your best garden

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January 2, 2009

It's time to make your New Year's resolutions and to vow to create a better garden.

We asked three South Florida garden experts what they had planned for their yards this year, and we got some great ideas. Check out their plans — and add some of your own.

Hopefully, these 10 garden resolutions will last longer than last year's solemn promise to hit the gym five days a week.



I will no longer abuse mulch.

Get Quotes!

This is a toughie because mulch abuse is so common that it has pretty much become accepted. But here are the ground rules. First and most important, everyone needs to use mulch. Frequently and enthusiastically. The more, the better because it keeps moisture in the plants. Second, stop buying cypress mulch in favor of melaleuca or eucalyptus. Cypress trees are valuable, wonderful trees — the others are pest trees. And finally, no more mulching up to the base of palm trees. This is a quick way to send your palm to the great nursery in the sky.

I will follow all the instructions on pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers.

If a little works, then a lot will work a lot better, right? Except when it doesn't. These products can be helpful, but they can also kill your plants, and they are pollutants that seep into the groundwater.

I will start asking for advice from people who know more than I do.

No more buying pretty little plants with unpronounceable names from clerks who wouldn't know an

impatiens from an Impala. This year, make a trip to a local nursery staffed by knowledgeable people who can tell you what grows where, how big it will get and how to take care of it.

I will finally replace my ficus hedge.

It was bad enough when ficus hedges were only known for their destructive roots and ability to consume all Saturday in trimming time. But now, with whiteflies wiping them out, it's time to finally dig up that ornery hedge and replace it with a mixed variety, environmentally-friendly substitute, such as cocoplum or even bamboo.

I will stop planting my sick houseplants outside.

Let's face it, there's no good end to this story. Either the plant will wilt and die because it can't handle the sun, or you'll discover it's a house-eating monster that can't wait to grow 50 feet tall. When houseplants are sick, discard them. They're cheap.

I will plant more natives, especially the odd ones.

Everybody knows native plants are easier to grow and require less water, but why do we only see the same 10 or so natives? This year, let's make an effort to search out some of the less-common natives, like wildflowers, necklace pods and beautyberry bushes, and give them a chance. It can only help.

I promise, promise, promise I'll stop ignoring the [Water restrictions](#).

This pretty much speaks for itself. On the flip side, I will water regularly and deeply, so my plants become stronger and more drought-tolerant.

I'll finally get a rain barrel.

A rain barrel might not save enough water to seriously dent your water bill, or even water the grass, but you will get enough water for all your containers. Besides, it's just the right thing to do.

I will get my trees trimmed by someone who knows what they're doing.

Better to hire someone than wait for a hurricane to do it for you. And the person you hire should be a

licensed, experienced arborist who won't over-trim your hardwood trees and shear your palms down to one or two fronds.

Finally, I will enjoy my garden more.

Florida is such a great place to garden. We can grow almost anything, in endless combinations of color and texture. So sometimes it's easy to take all this for granted. This year, let's promise to set aside just a little time to sit outside and enjoy the greenery.

Sources: Our resolvers this year were Jim Dezell, owner of Flamingo Road Nursery in Davie; John Pipoly, urban horticulture extension agent for [Broward County](#); and Kirk Scott, treasurer of the Broward chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society.

Growing smarter

More do's (rain barrels) and don'ts (container plantings). 4E

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