

## Today you can make a difference

We are fortunate to have the Indian River Lagoon in our collective backyard. This 156-mile-long waterway is teeming with life, offering ample opportunities for fishing, boating, swimming, sightseeing and wildlife viewing.

Directly or indirectly, everyone is responsible for maintaining the health of this natural treasure. Here are five simple tips people in the lagoon region can do to protect the lagoon:

- **Reduce fertilizer use.** Spreading excess fertilizer on your lawn wastes money and can contribute to algal blooms in the lagoon. If you must fertilize, use slow release fertilizers, which cost only a little more than other fertilizer types but will keep your yard fertilized much longer. Slow-release fertilizers do not wash out after the first rainfall, as most fertilizers do. When fertilizers wash into the lagoon, they can create algal blooms. A single pound of fertilizer can grow more than 500 pounds of algae in a waterway. Algae block sunlight from reaching seagrasses, which are the lagoon's most important fish habitat. Algae also rob the water of oxygen, causing fish kills.
- **Send only rain down the storm drains.** Storm drains are designed to carry rainwater away from roads and other developed areas, and many storm drains lead directly to the Indian River Lagoon. In reality, storm drains carry more than rainwater. They carry grass clippings, yard wastes, oils, trash and other assorted pollutants to the estuary. Keeping pollutants away from storm drains directly protects the water quality in the lagoon.
- **Pick up after your pet.** Pet waste left on paved surfaces or around storm drains and water bodies may eventually reach the lagoon or other surface waters after a rainstorm. Pet waste can be a significant source of nutrients and fecal coliform — bacteria that can potentially harm shellfish in the lagoon, making them unsafe to eat.
- **Use the right plant in the right place.** When choosing plants for your landscape, the main objective is to establish and maintain a healthy landscape by matching the right plants with existing site conditions so that



the use of additional resources — such as water, fertilizer, pesticides and labor — is minimized. Waterwise landscaping practices reduce the amount of pollutants reaching water bodies because fewer yard chemicals are used. Fertilizers and pesticides can contaminate waterways when they are washed out of a yard with the rain in stormwater runoff. In addition, choosing nonnative plants that are considered invasive can cause problems as they thrive in Florida's environment, growing and spreading rapidly or uncontrollably. These invaders often overwhelm native species and cause the loss or degradation of valuable habitats or the displacement and loss of wildlife. Additional information can be found at [floridaswater.com/waterwiselandscapes](http://floridaswater.com/waterwiselandscapes).

- **Leave only footprints.** Everyone wants to enjoy the beauty of North America's most biologically diverse estuary. For this reason, we all need to be conscious of our impact on the areas of the lagoon that we visit. Whatever garbage you accumulate during your lagoon outing (trash, wrappers, plastic bottles, cans, or monofilament fishing line) needs to come back with you, to be disposed of in proper waste containers. Also, leave what you find. Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects where you find them.

By practicing these five simple tips, we can all make a positive difference toward protecting and restoring the Indian River Lagoon.

Many storm drains lead directly to water bodies and often receive no treatment to remove wastes.