

Garden Budgeting

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When my wife and I started to put together a slide program on how we built our Florida native plant garden, she suggested that we include a section on resource allocation. After all, each of us can only devote so many capabilities, hours, and dollars to any given project. This article will hopefully keep a few souls from making some the same mistakes that we did.

We moved to our home in Temple Terrace during the fall of 1993 and inherited a typically landscaped Florida yard. It took about a year to get our new home to the point that we would actually do something with the yard. After some thought, we decided to put together a primarily native plant garden.

I read a number of books about native plants and tried to come up with a detailed landscape plan. A stack of books later, and in your basic down-to-earth state of confusion, I gave up and hired a designer. We gave the designer the concepts we'd come up with and turned him loose to design the plan. When it came in, we reviewed the plan, accepted it, and wrote a check. Writing a check is much easier and more productive than trying to sort out which of the 2800+ native plants to choose.

Not all of us have the time or ability to put together the technical botanical knowledge and the artistry needed to put together a sound design.

The construction of the planned wetland area and existing drainage problems required us to bring in earthmoving equipment. It took months for the equipment operator to show up – during the rainy season. We now had several thousand square feet of fine sand sloped into the planned wetland area that was theoretically protected by a thick layer of hardwood mulch. We planted a few things and were surprised when some mockingbirds promptly moved into a freshly planted wax myrtle and started a family. The garden was working already!

A local yellow corn snake took care of our mockingbird chicks and hurt our feelings. Things in the garden don't always work the way that you expect them to, and a snake's gotta do what a snake's gotta do.

The runoff from heavy summer rains caused erosion, washing the sands from under mulched areas, and carrying the sand down the slope and into our wetland area. We had to manually remove tons of saturated sand from our wetland - and back uphill - using a wheelbarrow. Several attempts to dam the waterflow failed and the rains washed the sand away again. Finally, we were able to secure the slope with sandbags and stabilize the wetland location.

That was far more physical work than these middle-aged, urban professional DINKs (double-income no kids) had anticipated. It was exhausting and demoralizing.

We had to take a break from the garden for a while to get our spirits built back up.

Susan and I like digging holes. Planting a few new species is fun when the weather is nice. Planting several hundred dollars worth of plants scattered all over the former yard in life-sucking early September heat is not, particularly when one has overspent and had to move money around to pay the normal household bills. Keeping all the plants in pots watered plus the planted stuff watered enough to get established is a job in itself.

After a while it starts to soak in. If you are worn out, plant poor, and are not in the mood to work in the garden, then it is time to take a break and review what you are doing wrong. The garden is supposed to be fun, one of the great joys in life. A garden will not be completed in a day or a month or a year.

You must budget yourself for the garden. Plan the time that you are going to spend in the garden and try to use the time wisely. Recognize that you might not be able to perform all of the tasks ahead and either adjust your plans or arrange to have someone else help perform the tasks. Budget money on a regular basis for the garden and use the money as a way to control the amount of work you put into the garden.

Your garden will be never completed and it is always changing. It needs you for the long term and that is good, for a garden is a joyful and living thing. ✨