



# the Hedgelines

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## Post Hurricane Helene

Natural disasters, such as hurricanes, can cause significant damage to our homes and surrounding landscapes. The aftermath hurricane Helene is overwhelming and can leave us unsure of how to begin the cleanup and rebuilding process. Remember, patience and diligence are key, and taking it one step at a time will lead to a successful cleanup. Stay safe!

### Post-Hurricane Landscape Cleanup Tips

If trees and shrubs have been toppled and uprooted, and you want to try to save them, you must cover exposed root material immediately and keep it moist. Cover the rootball with burlap or soil, and water daily until you are able to upright the tree or shrub. Prune the toppled tree just enough to balance root losses. Cut broken or dead branches before you pull the tree into an upright position. It is best to attempt to right downed trees while the ground is still moist. If necessary, remove some soil beneath the root mass so it will be even with the existing soil grade when pulled upright. Stake the tree for the first year to prevent it from falling again. It is best to use a broad strap of biodegradable rope at least one inch wide and move the strap periodically over the next year to minimize impacts to the bark.

Water appropriately, and do not fertilize immediately following the storm, as this can damage sensitive new roots that are trying to grow.

Turf and groundcovers should be cleared of debris and mud as soon as possible to allow them to recover. If your landscape had saltwater exposure, periodic flushes of fresh water are critical if your landscape has many salt intolerant species. Waiting for the symptoms of salt damage to appear can result in irreversible damage to your landscape.

### Creating a Hurricane-Tolerant Landscape

We can limit storm damage by picking the right plants and properly managing them. Storm-resistant trees should be decided based on their root development, mass, density, and growth characteristics. The majority of Florida's native trees and plants are excellent selections. These plants have shown resistance to heavy winds by surviving prior



storms. It is not that exotic plants cannot survive hurricanes; they can, but they must have the same qualities as native plants.

A storm "survivor" tree is compact, with a low center of gravity, a strong, solid trunk, and a huge, deep root system. Our native live oak is an excellent example of a "Survivor" tree, given the proper habitat and care during its life. During storms, the "weakest link" in landscapes is a tree with a high center of gravity, a dense canopy, a weak trunk, and shallow roots. Tall, thin pine trees exemplify the "weakest link," particularly those that formerly belonged to a pine forest before suburban expansion.

Trees assumed to be hurricane-resistant may nevertheless be vulnerable to high winds. Construction damage, poor growth circumstances, limited root zones, and disease or insect issues render trees prone to collapse during storms.

# Managing the Effects of Rising Water Rates

Across the country, household water rates have been rising as utilities invest in upgrading aging infrastructure, secure future supplies, and meet treatment standards for clean drinking water.

Ed Armstrong, Chair of Southwest Florida Management District, stated in the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan that our biggest challenge is ensuring adequate water supplies to meet current and anticipated growth. Still, that challenge will get harder and harder. The Recovery and Prevention Strategies implemented to ensure that water resources are protected clearly indicate that water restrictions and the cost of water are here to stay.

Earlier this year, the Florida Specifier explored rising water rates for Florida customers. “The upper Floridan aquifer is in danger of being over-pumped. Next year, the aquifer will reach the maximum sustainable withdrawal level before we start seeing impacts on lakes, streams, and wetlands.”

According to projections from the Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research, Florida's rapid population and economic growth are exacerbating the demand for its limited water supply. Florida is expected to have 26.4 million residents by 2040, roughly three million more than currently.

## Around the State

To meet the increased demands, **Polk County** water and wastewater rates will increase by 6% on Oct. 1, 2024, and 6% every year through 2028.

**City of Fort Lauderdale** residents will experience a gradual increase in water and wastewater rates. In FY24, the combined water and wastewater rates will rise by 14%, followed by an additional 14.4% increase in FY25. The subsequent years will see more modest adjustments, with a 9% increase in FY 26 and a 6.7% increase in FY 27.

The **City of Palm Coast** did a rate study suggesting the city increased utility rates by 18 percent.

**Winter Springs** approved a series of rate increases, beginning with an 18.6 percent increase totaling roughly \$11 per month in January. Incremental increases will continue until 2029.

In **Hillsborough County**, a residential water customer now pays \$93.38 for using 6,000 gallons each month. Under previously approved rate increases, that will jump 4% on October 1 and again on Oct. 1, 2025, bringing the cost in two years to \$103.30.

Proposed rate increases of 4% annually for the 12 following years would bring that monthly cost to \$201.86 on Oct. 1, 2036, a 116% increase over the current rate. Other possible options include a seven-year increase of 5% annually to reach \$163 on Oct. 1, 2031, or a 7% jump annually for two

years that would drop to a 4% hike in each of the following five years. That would also put the monthly bill at \$161.47 on Oct. 1, 2031.

## WaterSense Planning

Knowing the amount of water your sprinkler system applies to your lawn is an important step in efficient water use. One of the simplest ways to save both water and energy is to install water-efficient products. WaterSense labeled products not only save water but can also help reduce your energy bills.

## Water 101 for Communities

If you're on your homeowner's association board or you're a community association manager, visit our sister page, Water 101 for Communities, to learn about training, project funding opportunities, and educational resources that are ready to share with your residents.

Water is essential for businesses, communities, and for life in general. It feels like more of us are beginning to see that how we manage these resources will greatly determine the quality of life of millions of people now and into the future. Water conservation is the most important action we can take to sustain our water supplies, meet future needs, and reduce demands on Florida's water-dependent ecosystems such as springs, rivers, lakes, and wetlands.





# Why Plants Fail to Bloom

Are your plants not blooming as expected? The reasons can be as varied as the range of plants available. Whether you're a property manager ensuring the aesthetics of a landscape or a homeowner nurturing a personal garden, understanding the factors affecting blooming is essential.

## Reasons for Lack of Blooming

### Maturity

Plants bloom in order to reproduce and survive, and older settled plants may be "too comfortable" to need to bloom.

Many woody plants need to mature before they can produce flowers. For example, magnolias often take up to ten years to bloom, depending on their species and variety.

### Seasonal Damage

High temperatures or extended rainy periods can cause flower buds to abort or fall. However, most plants can recover once conditions normalize.

### Light

Adequate light is crucial for flowering. Some plants are "photoperiodic," meaning their flowering depends on the hours of light and dark they receive. "Short-day" plants like poinsettias and chrysanthemums need long dark periods to trigger blooming. Without the right light conditions, flowering can be delayed indefinitely. It's important for plants to be planted in a location to meet their specific light and moisture needs.

### Nutrition

If your soil nutrients are out of balance, you might experience very little flower growth. Soil with too much nitrogen produces lush foliage at the expense of flowers. Excess nitrogen hinders flower production. Too little phosphorus can also be the cause of plants not flowering.

Conversely, lacking key nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium can also delay blooming.

### Pruning

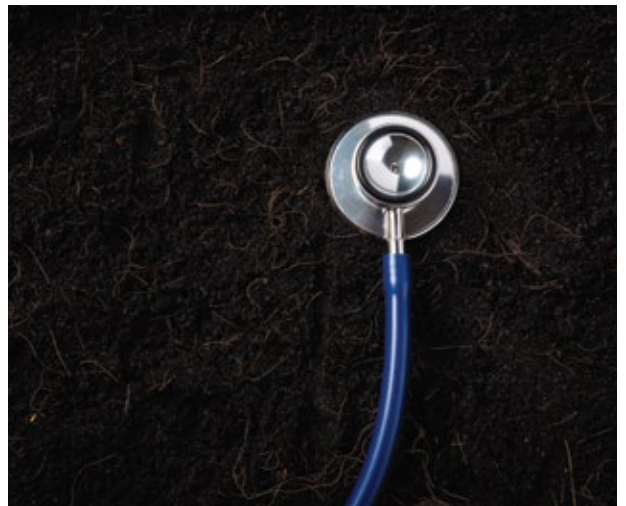
Improper pruning or incorrect timing can significantly affect flowering. Some perennials will only flower on old growth, while others flower on new growth. Improper pruning techniques or pruning at the wrong time can greatly reduce flowering. Learn the individual growing needs of your plants to better determine how to help them flourish. For instance, magnolias form buds in early autumn. Pruning them too late in the season can stop flowering altogether. A general rule is to prune spring-flowering shrubs and vines after they have bloomed.

Other improper pruning methods, such as excessive pruning, can result in failure to flower. Pruning is considered excessive when more than one-third of a plant is removed at a time. This type of pruning stimulates vegetative growth and results in little or no flower bud formation.

### Poor pollination

A lack of adequate pollinators can inhibit both flower and fruit production. Oftentimes, weather can be a factor here, as windy, cold, or wet weather can limit bee activity, resulting in poor pollination.

By understanding these factors, you can better support your plants in reaching their full blooming potential.





# Post Hurricane Landscape Renovation Tips

**Drought Tolerance:** There is a direct correlation between drought tolerance and salt tolerance. Typically, the more drought-tolerant the plant species, the more salt-tolerant it will be.

**Silver:** Plants with silver or blue waxy coatings typically endure salt spray very well.

**Maturity:** Size is important. Typically, small plants of even highly tolerant plant species are less durable than mature specimens; here, height is not an advantage.

**Containerized:** Pot-grown plants are established quicker than field-grown and dug plants, typically resulting in a more durable plant in a shorter period of time.

**Health:** Plants in good condition handle all threats much better than weaker plants.

**Irrigation:** After heavy amounts of salt spray and saltwater inundation, quick and thorough irrigation/watering is strongly recommended.

**Buffers:** Planting buffers of wind-tolerant plant species around more delicate plants will help protect them from wind damage. Plants in groups typically survive better than solitary plantings.

**Berms:** Increasing the height of the planting bed above the surrounding grade will typically decrease the amount of salt reaching the roots, minimizing salt damage.

**Natives:** Plants native to Florida typically endure wind and salt better than inland species.

**Balance:** Landscapes should be designed with durability and longevity in mind. However, many beautiful plants deserve to be included in your garden, even if they are not hurricane-tolerant. Many shrubs and colorful plants are inexpensive and should be considered disposable, but well worth the effort and cost between hurricanes.



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