



in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

How Green Is Your Garden? Levels: Green, Brown, Or Black

Stephen & Kristin Pategas

Gain one point for each these 25 accomplishments:

- Only use a renewable organic mulch such as pine bark or pine needles (no cypress!)
- Use fallen leaves for mulch
- Use all low volume irrigation
- Can confirm you have a functioning rain sensor on the irrigation system
- Have checked for irrigation leaks in the last month
- Let healthy plant trimmings add to the mulch levels
- Keep mulch levels at a 2-3 inch depth
- See lots of lady beetles in the garden
- Regularly use at least one rain barrel
- Have lawn areas irrigated on a separate zone and program
- Grow butterfly plants for nectar and larval food
- Eat something you grow
- Grow most of the herbs you use
- Have a Backyard Wildlife Habitat, Florida Friendly Yard or Florida Water Star designation
- Have a bird feeder (with feed in it right now)
- Eliminated all of your lawn
- Have a hummingbird feeder filled and cleaned regularly in spring and autumn
- Read this column every month
- Follow the seasonal irrigation watering rules
- Keep soil levels low to catch rainfall and minimize storm water run-off with debris going into the street
- Have a year-round water source for wildlife including bees and butterflies
- Grow blooming plants to attract bees and other pollinators
- Use only organic pest control
- Use hoses and watering cans for spot watering
- Use a composter for organic matter

Lose one point for each of these 16 miscues:

- Use cypress mulch (banned in Winter Park), which is a non-renewable resource and causes the destruction of wetlands
- Send every shrub trimming or grass clipping out as yard trash
- Dispose of fallen leaves as yard trash instead of using them as mulch
- Buy plants just because they look cool but don't know anything about them
- Put yard trash in with the garbage or even worse, the recycling
- Don't know where the irrigation rain sensor is located
- Don't know how to adjust the irrigation controller
- Run the whole irrigation system more often if just a few plants need more water
- Have mulch or soil piled against tree trunks or shrub stems
- Irrigate so there is irrigation water spraying on sidewalks or driveways
- Have the majority of your plants sheared
- Have old mulch removed and then freshened with new
- Grow invasive plants in your garden
- Have bare soil showing in garden beds
- Don't have the irrigation system checked at least quarterly for leaks and proper coverage
- Don't know what green gardening is

HOW DID YOU SCORE?

Green: 20 to 25 points

Brown: 10 to 19 points

Black: Negative to 9 points



At left: make sure the rain sensor is working properly. Below: how many edibles do you grow?



At left: use at least one rain barrel to fill watering cans - which are great for spot watering.



Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis