

Water - essential, efficient, clear and clean.

BY BOB ABBERGER

Davis Islands, how cool is it to feel that sense of relief each day as you cross the bridge coming home? We are the lucky few. Yet with our good fortune comes heightened awareness. We observe water conditions twice a day, revel firsthand when it looks clear and clean, and wonder when it's brown and strewn with trash or filled with algae.

After nearly 30 years of continuous improvement, our Tampa Bay saw a decline in an estimated 5,411 acres of seagrass between 2018 and 2020, about a 13% decline overall. That's less grass for fish, manatees, and crabs, and for the birdies that feed on them, due to pollution run-off and wastewater leaks that add nutrients and fuel excess algae growth (can we say Piney Point!)

“Water is the basic and essential need of every living creature, and clean, safe, and sustainable water resources and supplies are vital to the City of Tampa; Florida’s economy, environment, citizens, and visitors,” says Mayor Jane Castor.

So what can we do?

We can take steps to reduce toxic chemicals from running off our lawns and micro plastics from entering the bay. We can take better care of the clean water resources we have and work to protect our aquifer from saltwater intrusion.

How many of us ask which chemicals are being used on our lawns? Painfully, of the most commonly used lawn pesticides, many are linked with cancer or carcinogenicity, birth defects, reproductive effects, liver or kidney damage, neurotoxicity, and can leach to the freshwater system and be toxic to fish, bees, and birdies. Ask your provider for organic solutions to lawn care. Can you switch to native plants that help the bees? If you live on the water or canal front, a bioswale of stone and fabric along the seawall will help with erosion and filtrate the flow of chemicals in a storm. Chemical-free soil begets robust lawns that can virtually take care of themselves.

Davis Islands is fortunate to have access to Tampa’s reclaimed water system. Every new home should be connecting and every existing home should determine if they can connect. The [Resilient Tampa Roadmap](#) asks us to recognize all water as a single resource with a lifecycle that can be optimized and managed. Learn about best irrigation practices at www.tampa.gov/water/conservation and send your irrigation efficiency questions to Savewater@tampa.gov.

Let’s all commit to water quality and efficiency and keep Davis Islands our treasured retreat. Here’s our call to action!

1. Check with your service provider for organic lawn solutions, or change to a provider who will. The University of Florida answers all of your lawn care questions at [Ask IFAS](#).

2. Consider expanding natural plantings and reduce that lawn. Your UF/IFAS Extension agent can get you started with the nine principles of [Florida Friendly Landscaping](https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/) – call (813) 744-5519 or visit <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>
3. Consider doing a stone/fabric bioswale if you're a waterfront home owner
4. Use the City of Tampa to help you become efficient!
 - a. tampa.gov/savewater
 - (1) Whether you are a penny-pincher, tree-hugger, or anywhere in between, the city offers a wealth of resources on its website to help homeowners and businesses achieve higher levels of water efficiency. Contact your water efficiency team by phone at (813) 274-8121, option #5, or by email at SaveWater@tampa.gov.
 - (2) Rain is free water! Test your rain sensor to avoid overwatering your lawn, especially during rainy season. Tampa Water Department customers can request a [free replacement rain sensor](#).
 - (3) Save water, save cash. The [Indoor Plumbing Retrofit](#) kit is filled with water-saving tips and conservation devices, and is available to Tampa Water Department customers free of charge. A lot of water is wasted by broken sprinkler heads and irrigation system leaks. E-mail SaveWater@tampa.gov and ask for a free [Find it. Flag it. Fix it.](#) kit!
 - (4) The Community Water Wise Awards program recognizes individuals and businesses that are committed to conserving our water resources. To see a video tour of Tampa's 2020 award-winning yards, visit the [City of Tampa's YouTube channel](#). Enter your garden at [Community Water Wise Awards](#).
 - b. tampabaywater.org/Conservation/Tampa-Bay-Water-Wise
 - (1) Tampa Bay Water provides Tampa Water Department customers with residential and commercial rebates for replacing inefficient, out-of-date fixtures, like toilets and commercial dishwashers, with high-efficiency alternatives. If you are considering a renovation to your home or business, you could offset significant costs by checking the eligibility requirements and applying for these rebates.
 - c. swfwmd.state.fl.us/residents/water-conservation/water-incentives-supporting-efficiency-wise
 - (1) The Southwest Florida Water Management District has begun offering a cost share program to member governments, Water Incentives Supporting Efficiency (WISE), which can offset up to 50 percent of the cost of water conservation projects sponsored by neighborhoods and businesses. Such projects include high-efficiency fixture replacements, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ conversions, weather stations for irrigation control, and several others. This WISE program is tailored to make the biggest impact in communities like Davis Islands where development projects abound.