Citrus County's First Florida Water Star℠ Home: Heritage in Hernando
By Audrey Durr, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) Program Coordinator

In January, the model home at Heritage in Hernando was recognized as Citrus County's first Florida Water Star℠ (FWS) home. FWS is a voluntary certification program for builders and developers, which is designed to increase water efficiency in landscapes, irrigation systems and indoors. The Southwest Florida Water Management District is encouraging good water stewardship to the building industry by offering this recognition program that focuses on water efficiency and water quality protection.

An FWS home incorporates best practices and products relating to the irrigation system, landscape, and appliances and plumbing fixtures. Features of the FWS program include:

- Requires micro-irrigation and mulch in plant beds.
- Limits high-volume irrigation system to 50 percent of planted landscape area.
- Requires high-performance, water-conserving appliances and fixtures.
- Requires points related to water quality issues for homes built near water bodies.
- Requires landscapes for the right plant in the right place.

Heritage in Hernando is committed to building water- and energy-efficient "green" homes and plans to build all future homes to FWS standards. Heritage has also received the 2010 AURORA Award for "Best Natural Gas Residential Development," a 2010 "Exceptional Energy Award" from Florida Public Utilities, ENERGY STAR® certification, Florida Green Building Coalition certification and recognition as a "Florida-Friendly Yard" through the University of Florida/IFAS Extension.

SWFWMD staff and Citrus County FFL staff have been working with Heritage in Hernando since August 2010 to assist in the FWS certification and Florida-Friendly Yard recognition process.

The lawn is Argentine bahiagrass instead of St. Augustinegrass because of bahiagrass' superior drought tolerance and pest resistance, as well as lower fertilization requirements. Once established, the bahiagrass doesn't require irrigation except during extended drought. Chinch bugs do not affect bahiagrass; its only major pest is the mole cricket, which can be controlled naturally by planting larraflower and partridge pea to attract a beneficial wasp that kills mole crickets.

Argentine bahiagrass was used instead of Pensacola bahiagrass because Argentine produces fewer seed heads and has a darker color, denser growth and wider leaf blades.

Drought-tolerant, low-maintenance native and exotic plants were used in the mulched beds, including loropetalum, liriope, Muhly grass, flax lily, Schilling's dwarf holly, yew and 'Firepower' nandina (a noninvasive variety). Visit www.FloridaYards.org to learn more about hundreds of Florida-friendly plants and to use the interactive plant database to select plants suited to your yard.

Citrus County UF/IFAS Extension's Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ program is a free public education program that is funded jointly by the Citrus County Board of County Commissioners and the Coastal Rivers and Withlacoochee River basin boards of the Southwest Florida Water Management District. For more information, call 352-527-5700 or visit http://citrus.ifas.ufl.edu and www.SolutionsForYourLife.com.

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