



# FEMA

## *Drought Springs a Well of Community Support*

**Sarasota, FL-** In 1992, Sarasota, Manatee and Polk counties entered into their second multi-year drought. For the first time, the Southwest Florida Water Management District imposed mandatory water restrictions as residents reported wells could not supply enough water for drinking and cooking. Drought remediation and water conservation became a priority, and the University of Florida’s Sarasota County Extension Office offered a new educational tool with the Florida House Learning Center.

On Earth Day in 1994, the 1,557 square foot learning center opened its doors to visitors who may have seen demonstrations of water-saving techniques for the first time. On display were drought-resistant landscaping, low water use appliances and cisterns that collect and reuse non-potable water for irrigation.

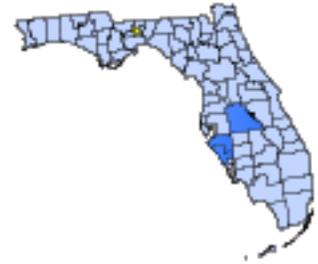
As technologies advanced, the learning center demonstrated dual-flush toilets, high-powered, low-flow showerheads and water-recycling equipment. Based on national consumption figures, the water-saving tools could reduce average daily water usage by one third, to less than 50 gallons a day.

The learning center also advocates the benefits of cistern systems. Some visitors installed the systems to collect rainwater for irrigation purposes or for non-consumptive uses, such as washing clothes or flushing toilets. Along with reusing wastewater, landscaping with water-wise products and plantings can preserve the water table.

The learning center displays numerous native plants and works closely with the University of Florida Extension Office, so people can determine plantings that best fit their care and watering needs. Besides demonstrating drought-resistant landscaping, or xeriscaping, and showing visitors how to transform their lawns with turf replacements, such as fescue grass, the center teaches visitors about decorative touches that increase water flow into the water table rather than into the sewers or streets.

Though drought education was the initial focus of the facility, the center added a number of displays focusing on hurricane resistance and how to react to storm threats. As a result, visitors can examine seven different shutter types, hurricane-resistant windows, windborne debris-resistant screens, safe rooms, Florida Building Code roofing techniques and reinforced garage doors.

Results of public surveys show radio and television drought education efforts of the 1990s failed, but the learning center’s surveys conducted over its 12-year history show a 35 percent improvement in drought-resistant behavior among visitors.



Multiple Counties,  
Florida



### Quick Facts

Sector:

**Public**

Cost:

**\$125,000.00 (Estimated)**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Education/Outreach/Public Awareness**

Primary Funding:

**Non-profit organization (NPO)**