Littoral Zones
What are they and what do they do?

The shallow down-sloping shelf of a lake or pond is commonly referred to as the lake’s “littoral zone”. The zone is an area where the water meets the land. Plants here support wildlife such as wading birds, turtles and crabs. Littoral Zones are crucial components of healthy ecosystems, hence are protected by law. A primary function of a planted littoral zone is to absorb pollutants from water that ultimately drain into our canals and rivers, particularly water generated from storms. Littoral zone vegetation also prevents shoreline erosion. Since 1985, Martin County has required that a percentage of each lake, pond, or stormwater retention pond be established as a littoral zone.

Well functioning littoral areas are aesthetically pleasing, add habitat for wildlife and increase property values.

Turtles spend hours basking in the sun.

This brochure provides you with some interesting facts about the Littoral Zones of Martin County, Florida.
Healthy lakes are good lakes

A balanced, healthy lake will easily support healthy plants and wildlife. A balanced lake will require little maintenance and few (if any) chemicals. Not only will the lake’s required littoral zone be aesthetically pleasing but its improved water quality will help reduce foul odors and excessive mosquitoes.

The information in this brochure will help guide the property owner in fulfilling the obligation to plant a successful littoral zone.

To create an aesthetically pleasing zone, the hearty plants listed in the diagram to the right are suggested. More detailed information is available at your local public library or from the following organizations, to name a few:

- IFAS, Center for Aquatic Plants, Circular 912 Aquascaping
- Association of Native Plant Nurseries
- Native Plant Society of Martin County

Examples of Marsh and Littoral Shelf Plantings

Upland
Above +1.5'
- Red Maple
  Acer rubrum
- Bald Cypress
  Taxodium distichum
- Swamp Bay
  Persea palustris
- Sweet Gum
  Liquidambar styaciflua

Transitional
+1.5' to +0.5'
- Buttonbush
  Cephalanthus occidentalis
- Sand Cordgrass
  Spartina bakeri
- St. John’s Wort
  Hypericum spp.
- Sawgrass
  Cladium jamaicense

Shallow
+0.5' to -0.5'
- Blue Flag Iris
  Iris virginica
- Golden Canna
  Canna flaccida
- Soft Rush
  Juncus effusus
- Spikerush
  Elurcharis celulosa

Mid
-0.5' to -3.0'
- Arrowhead
  Sagittaria lancifolia
- Pickerelweeds
  Pontederia cordata
- Soft-stem Bulrush
  Scirpus validus

Deep
-3.0' to -5.0'
- Soft-stem Bulrush
  Scirpus validus
- Fragrant White Lily
  Nymphaea odorata
- Spatterdock
  Nuphar luteum
- Tapegrass
  Vallisneria americana

* Can grow in permanent water
** Endures flooding