

Master Gardener Volunteers, a Chapter of Friends of Sarasota County Parks
Learning Florida Friendly Landscape Principles through an
Americans With Disability Act Compliant Sensory Garden

The Master Gardener Volunteers, a Chapter of Friends of Sarasota County Parks' mission is to assist Sarasota County Extension in providing research-based horticultural education, particularly Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles, to Florida residents. Widespread application of these principles increases planting the right plant in the right place, water conservation and proper fertilization; reduces herbicide, fungicide and insecticide use; introduces integrated pest management techniques; and increases installation of wildlife-friendly landscapes.

The **Learning Florida Friendly Landscape Principles through an Americans With Disability Act Compliant Sensory Garden** initiative will expand their Educational Outreach Gardens at the Twin Lakes Park Extension campus to include an Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessible Sensory Garden, allowing county residents of all abilities to engage in hands-on learning of these sustainable landscape principles.

The total budget for this initiative is \$293,123, with the Impact100 SRQ grant funding \$109,000 of the Sensory Garden construction materials including the paint, stucco and waterproofing for the planters, the walkways, seating structure, railings and benches. The additional required funds are projected to be collected in 2024 from a variety of sources. MGVs will provide the plant materials.

The first part of Phase I of the Educational Outreach Garden is underway and funded, with installation of utilities and a greenhouse. The ADA-accessible Sensory Garden will complete Phase I. The Sensory Garden will include an outdoor classroom, wide permeable pathways, and raised beds containing plants, well-adapted to this region, that engage all five senses. Educational signage will be installed, highlighting insect life and pest management, the importance of landscaping with native plants, development of healthy soil, and smart water conservation. The raised beds and wide walkways will be ideal for filming demonstration videos, which they plan to share digitally.

The Sensory Garden's impact will be measured through visitation rates, surveys tracking behavioral changes and skills acquisition, and increases in course offerings and enrollment. As an enduring permanent structure, the Sensory Garden will be maintained and sustained by the MGVs who are committed to providing an ongoing maintenance fund and volunteer gardening hours.

Friends of Sarasota County Parks is the volunteer arm to the Sarasota County Extension, the park property owner. For over 25 years, they have positively change landscaping behaviors detrimental to our land and water resources. The need for this education continues to increase with the growth of Sarasota County's population and resulting strain on the environment. Additionally, increasing educational outreach to people with special needs will help those

residents gain horticultural knowledge and life skills. The new Sensory Garden will help transform the Extension campus into a demonstration destination where residents of all abilities will learn how to protect Florida's precious land and water resources.