SEAGRASS

More seagrass means cleaner water, healthier bays and better fishing

Seagrasses are flowering plants that form spectacular underwater meadows. They provide food and shelter to many marine species and are one of the most productive ecosystems in the world. Here in the Greater Sarasota Bay Area, 70% of our fish species spend part of their life in seagrass. Seagrasses also trap sediments and store carbon. Because they use sunlight for photosynthesis, seagrasses require clear water to survive — making them a biological indicator of successful water quality practices. No matter where we live or work, stormwater from our homes and businesses eventually flows to our bays. As a result, our actions at home and work affect water clarity, seagrass meadows and sea life in our bays.

Above Seagrass meadows provide food and habitat for a variety of bay life, including manatees, bay scallops, red drum and sea turtles. Photo credits: snorkeler (Tampa Bay Estuary Program: Be Floridian), manatee (Marine Mammal Commission), scallop (David Moynahan), red drum (Florida Seagrant).

Recovery of Sarasota Bay's Seagrass Meadows is one of the greatest environmental success stories of our generation — seagrass coverage across Sarasota Bay has recovered and surpassed levels not seen since the 1950s.

Recognizing opportunities to improve deteriorating bay conditions in the 1990s, Sarasota County Stormwater Environmental Utility and Wastewater Utility, together with key partners including the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program and Southwest Florida Water Management District launched an historic initiative to reduce stormwater and wastewater pollution entering the bay. Today, Sarasota Bay enjoys over 40% more seagrass than restorable 1950 levels — totaling over 13,000 acres. We have a lot to be proud of and to protect.

Be part of the seagrass success story, and help reduce nutrient pollution originating from your home and business:

- Replace concrete driveways and walkways with pervious surfaces, like pavers and shell, to help water soak into the ground instead of becoming runoff.
- Pick up and properly dispose of pet waste.
- Follow local fertilizer ordinances that prohibit use of fertilizers containing nitrogen and phosphorus during summer rainy months (June 1 – September 30). The rest of the year you can use fertilizers with 50 percent or better slow-release formulas.
- Replace grass with Florida native or Florida friendly plants, which don't require so much fertilizer, pesticides and water.
- Properly maintain your septic system and sewer pipes, and support programs to convert septic to sewer in your neighborhood.
- Monitor local water quality and seagrass recovery online at the Sarasota Water Atlas.
- Get involved! Volunteer for the annual Seagrass Monitoring Survey, hosted by Sarasota County Stormwater Environmental Utility, to document seagrass coverage in the bay. Volunteer for the Great Annual Scallop Search, hosted by Sarasota Bay Watch, to count scallops in Sarasota Bay's famous seagrass meadows.

Florida friendly homes and businesses adopt landscaping that requires less fertilizer, pesticides and water, and lets rainwater soak into the ground instead of becoming runoff.

Volunteers join the annual Volunteer Seagrass Monitoring Survey to learn more about Sarasota Bay's three most common seagrasses — Turtle Grass, Manatee Grass and Shoal Grass (photo by Sarasota Herald Tribune/Carla Varisco, licensed under creative commons).

To learn more about Seagrasses and how you can get involved, call (941) 861-5000 or visit **Sarasota Water Atlas** online and search for "seagrass".

Sarasota County
scgov.net | 941.861.5000