Building a NEST for environmental care

Turtle Rock in Palmer Ranch is the county's newest Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team community.

The neighborhood marked the NEST designation Saturday by planting aquatic vegetation in a storm-water retention pond on Turtle Rock Boulevard.

Jeff Whaley from Aquatic Systems donated more than 200 plants for the effort — pickerelweed, duck potato, jointed spikebrush, bulrush, water lilies and golden canna.

On Saturday he helped with their installation along the small pond at the southern end of Meadow Rush Loop.

The group also learned last week that it received a $3,400 grant to put in a butterfly garden near the pond.

Contributions from the community will bring the total to $6,800, said Sandi Betz-Eisenberg, a member of the environmental committee.

For further information, please call 929-9092 or 870-2489.
Turtle Rock neighbors create butterfly garden

Turtle Rock's Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team met Aug. 8 to create a butterfly garden around a small storm-water retention pond beside Turtle Rock Boulevard.

The group that included everyone from children to 90-somethings planted more than 100 Florida friendly and native plants. It is working to educate neighbors about how to use fewer chemicals on their yards and to put the right plants in the right places.

In April, the group put water plants in the adjacent pond to take up any nutrients that might reach the water.

Around the same time, Turtle Rock NEST learned that the county had awarded it a $3,400 grant to put in the butterfly garden that members planted Aug. 8. Contributions from the community brought the total to $6,800.

+ (Green) thumbs-up

Turtle Rock residents Sandie Betz-Eisenberg and her mother, 90-year-old gardening enthusiast Elsa Betz, joined dozens of neighbors Friday morning to plant butterfly gardens in neighborhood green space.

After two years of back-and-forth communication with Sarasota County, the Palmer Ranch community secured $3,900 in grant money this summer to plant several butterfly habitats in upland pond areas.

Coordinators for the Sarasota Bay Estuary program were on hand to give pointers on proper planting procedures. (Tip No. 1: Plant more than one nectar source. Adult butterflies have a short lifespan. Planting a variety of nectar sources will encourage more butterflies to flock to your garden.)

The Turtle Rock Neighborhood Association originally requested money for a pond-restoration project, but the county turned down the proposal after determining that the plants "would not take" in wetland environments.

Ironically, landscapers planted the denied aquatic flora a year ago just to "test them out," and according to Betz-Eisenberg, the plants are "growing phenomenally well."