

Landscape University: Meeting Continuing Education Needs Through Engaging Virtual Learning

Morgan Pinkerton, UF/IFAS Extension Seminole County, morgan0402@ufl.edu
Hannah Eason, UF/IFAS Extension Orange County, hwooten@ufl.edu
Brooke Moffis, UF/IFAS Extension Lake County, burnb48@ufl.edu



Situation

Florida's nursery and landscape industries contribute \$25.4 billion in sales and provide 242,000 jobs in the state annually. While many businesses faced pandemic related closures, Florida's horticulture industry thrived due to heightened interest in at-home gardening and outdoor activities. Many green industry professionals must hold state pesticide and/or fertilizer licenses, requiring 4-20 continuing education units (CEUs) every one to four years for renewal. The COVID-19 pandemic initially drove the demand for virtual CEU opportunities, but a post-pandemic needs assessment of the local green industry confirmed a continued demand for online education. In response to this need, three extension agents in Central Florida developed Landscape University, first offered in 2021.

Objectives

1. Provide accessible and engaging virtual CEU opportunities for Florida's green industries.
2. Increase knowledge and skills through targeted professional development.
3. Promote the adoption of sustainable landscape practices.

Educational Methods

From 2021 to 2025, agents hosted Landscape University annually during the industry's slow season, delivering a weekly one-hour webinar series over six weeks each January-February. Webinar topics varied annually based on industry feedback and featured presentations, real-world case studies, poll questions, and live Q&A sessions. Classes were pre-approved for CEUs by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Post-webinar surveys and 6-month follow-up surveys were used to measure knowledge gain and behavior change objectives.

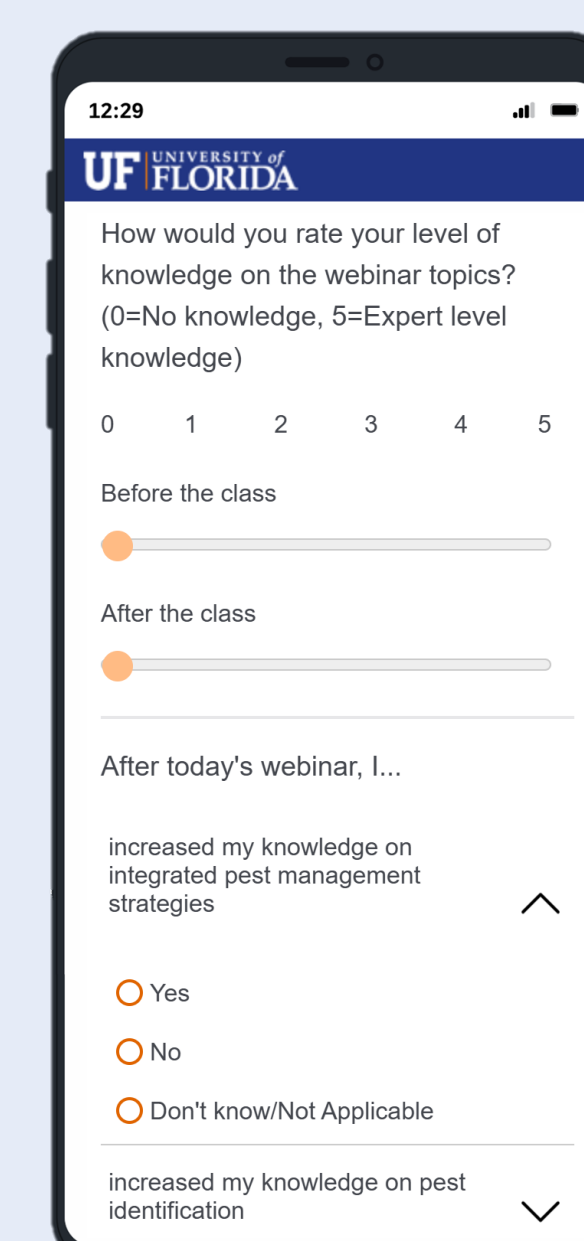


A flyer featuring the 2025 Landscape University webinar series agenda was used for both in-person and online promotion. Participants were encouraged to register for all six weeks at a discounted rate.

Social media graphics were created for each webinar and shared broadly on many online platforms.



Interactive polls were used throughout the webinars to engage with the audience and record participation for CEUs.



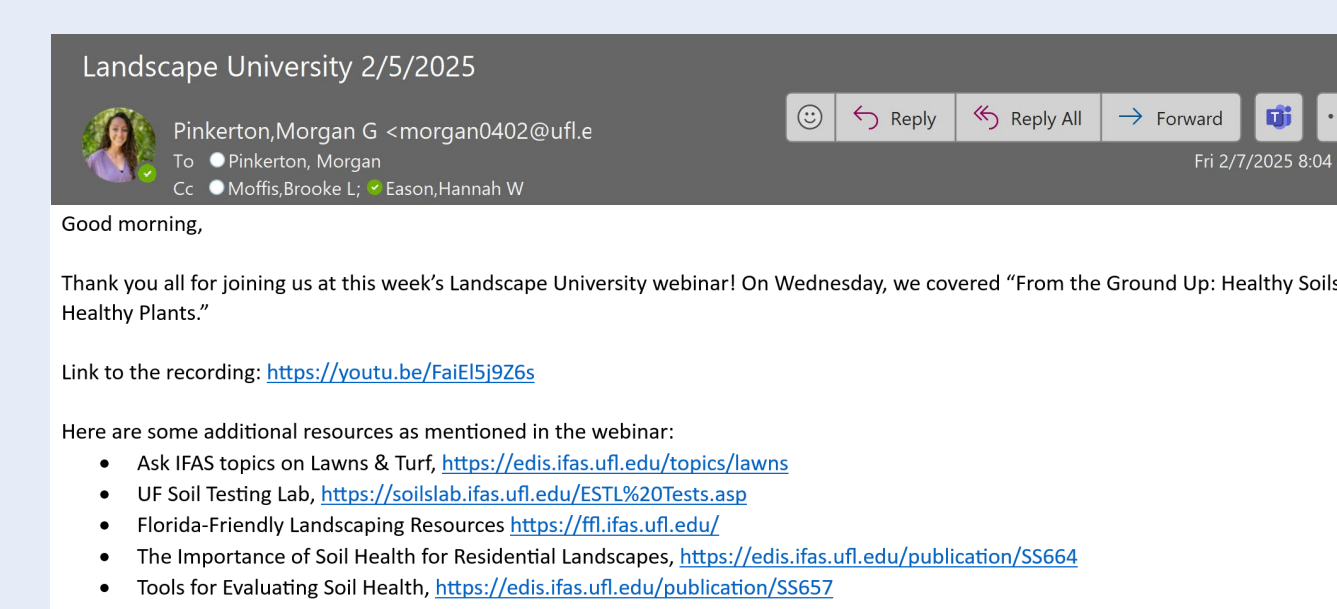
Immediately after each webinar, participants received a Qualtrics survey via email, which could be accessed on any web-enabled device, including mobile browsers. Similarly, 6-month follow-up surveys were distributed by email to assess the long-term adoption of learned behaviors.



After each live session, the webinar recordings were uploaded to YouTube and shared with participants. Scan the QR code below to access the 2025 Landscape University webinar playlist.



Every week, participants received an email featuring the webinar recording and links to supplementary resources mentioned during the session.



Results

The Landscape University webinars have engaged 1,241 live participants with over 734 CEUs issued, and 182 views on recordings. In post-webinar surveys, 93.4% (733/785) of respondents increased their knowledge with an average gain of +1.21 on a 5-point scale (n=195). In 6-month follow-up surveys, 90.4% (47/52) of respondents adopted at least one learned practice since attending the webinars. Some specific practices adopted include:

- 75.0% properly identified pest, pathogens and weeds prior to treatment.
- 75.0% checked environmental conditions (ie. chances of rain, wind, soil type, etc.) prior to applying pesticides and/or fertilizer.
- 73.1% utilized integrated pest management strategies.
- 71.2% rotated pesticide modes of action between applications.
- 69.2% employed best management practices for irrigation.
- 65.4% considered aspects of location (sunlight, water/irrigation requirements, soil type, etc.) prior to planting.
- 61.5% reduced the number of pesticide applications (average reduction 1.25-2.25 sprays per year).

Conclusions

Landscape University is a highly innovative annual webinar series that provides quality continuing education to horticulture professionals in the green industries. By offering interdisciplinary content and engaging virtual delivery, it meets the critical need for accessible education on sustainable landscape practices while fulfilling CEU requirements for license renewal. The program serves as a model for similar virtual programs that aim to increase knowledge, promote the adoption of sustainable practices and provide professional development opportunities to clients.

