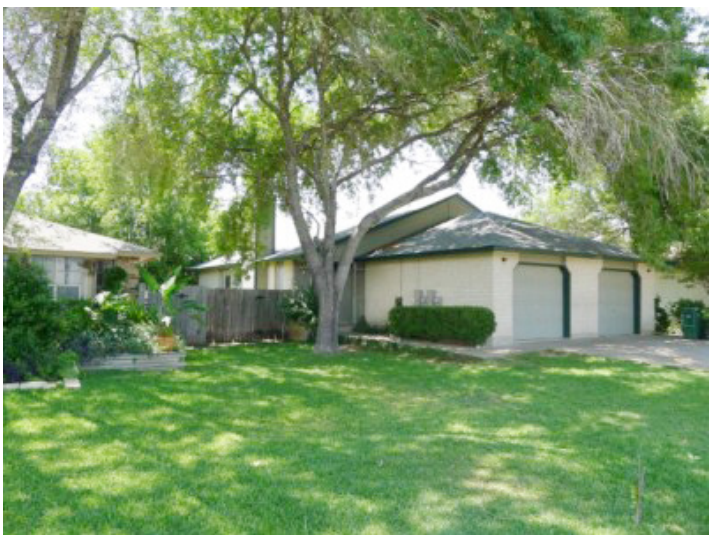
WaterWise Landscape Frequently Asked Questions

What is a WaterWise Landscape?

A Waterwise Landscape is a landscape or garden that uses techniques to reduce or eliminate the need for supplemental irrigation. Some techniques are:

- Amending the soil with compost and using mulch in order to retain soil moisture and prevent water loss through evaporation.
- Changing the irrigation heads to drip or low-flow nozzles.
- Planting native plants that don't require as much water as non-native or exotic plants.



Example of healthy lawn.

What does 75% healthy turf mean and why is it a qualifying requirement?

This program is intended to incentivize customers to change their irrigation habits. If you are already not watering your yard on a regular basis and as a result your yard is in distress, it is likely this program will not reduce your water usage. However, for those who want to reduce their water usage while maintaining a healthy and attractive lawn, this program will provide some assistance. While not all lawns are the same, 75% of each conversion area should be healthy turf grass. Prior to acceptance in the program, a site inspection may be necessary to determine the health of the turf. Dead lawns will not qualify. Thinning and dormant grass will be considered if we are in the midst of a seasonal change. A site visit may be needed to inspect the area if pictures do not adequately portray the condition of the area.

Example of lawn that may need a pre-inspection to qualify.

What if I want to convert over 5,000 sq.ft.?

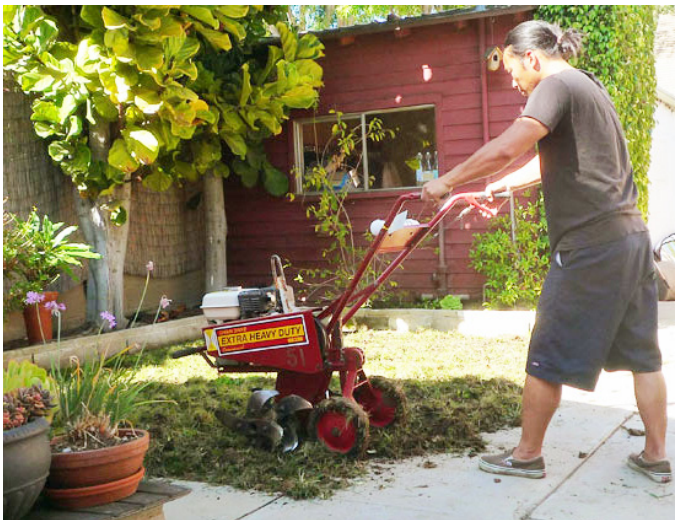
You may convert over 5,000 sq.ft. at one time. Our rebate funds only allow up to 5,000 sq.ft. per applicant. ($1,250) Any conversion area over 5,000 sq.ft. will not get a rebate per application. The program does allow for people to enter in multiple acceptance periods given that another eligible area of turf grass is converted to a WaterWise landscape.

Example of lawn that will not qualify.

How do I remove the turf grass and what should I do to the converted area afterwards?

There are many options for removing turf. Your budget and effort will determine which option or combination of options is best for you. Sod cutters can be used to remove the grass below its roots, A tiller will break up the turf into clumps which can be discarded, The grass

can be smothered with newspaper or cardboard or it can be solarized. Whichever method you choose, it is important to fully remove the grass to prevent it from coming back. The next step would be to till the plant bed area down 6 inches. An inch of soil amended with compost can be added into this process to make sure nutrients are added to the soil and water is retained. If you are converting to gravel or just plain mulch beds, remember that a weed barrier fabric must be placed on top of the soil before you add your hardscape.



Tilling photo courtesy of Charlesandhudson.com

What is solarization?

Solarization is a non-chemical method that uses the heat of the soil and sun to bake the grass and weeds. To solarize an area, water it well, cover with clear, thick plastic, and weigh down the edges of the plastic. The grass beneath will sunburn and ultimately die.

Why do I have to make changes to my automatic sprinkler system?

Spray heads that water turf grass will not be efficient for watering native plants. If you were not planning on capping off the irrigation in the converted area, we recommend converting the area to drip irrigation. Less water is lost to evaporation with this irrigation method and is supported in the newly adopted watering ordinance. Austin Water also has a rebate to help you out with your irrigation conversion. If you did the work yourself, an irrigation evaluation will have to be done by Austin Water to make sure the work was done correctly.

To solarize an area, water it well, cover with clear, thick plastic, and weigh down the edges of the plastic.

What about Bermuda grass, it keeps coming back?

Bermuda can be very tricky to fully remove; the best method is to kill the grass by one of the methods listed above. Once the grass is dead, dig it out and till the area removing as much of the blade and root as possible. Wait a couple weeks to see where the grass is coming back. Repeat the process on any grass that returns. After the 2nd or 3rd time, all the grass should be gone. Topping the area with mulch will make it more difficult for the grass to creep back in the future.

Why do I have to wait for the fall or spring to begin plant installation?

Plants go through a great deal of stress during installation. The intense heat of our summer months, matched with our dry conditions, make it a struggle to keep them healthy during establishment. In the spring and fall our evaporation rate is lower and we receive more rainfall so less supplemental watering is needed.

What should be planted in the fall vs. the spring?

While there are benefits for planting in either season, you may install your approved plant selection in the fall or spring without worry. The fall is a great time to plant trees, shrubs, cacti, succulents and many perennials as this encourages root growth over the winter months, thus giving you a head start in the spring. Typically, spring is a great time for planting flowering perennials as they will have already gone through one winter dormancy period at the nursery; this will foster a quicker establishment period once in the ground. Whether you're installing in the fall or spring, your landscape will need to be completed by the deadline to ensure adequate time for establishment before winter freezes or intense summer heat. Whichever time you choose, careful plant selection and proper planting techniques will always be the best way to ensure your new landscape will establish nicely and thrive.
For more information on selecting plants and installation techniques check out www.growgreen.org

There are more native plants than those listed in the Grow Green guide; can I plant them?

We recognize that there are many more plants that are native and will thrive in the landscape than those listed in the Grow Green guide. If there are specific plants you have in mind, you may include a plant list with your application or contact us to see if they qualify.

May I install mulch beds at any time or do I have to wait for the installation period?

Mulch hardscape portions of your conversion may begin once approved by Austin Water; however, plant material needs to be installed within the spring and fall installation windows. Remember over 50% of the project area must have plant cover so budget wisely.

What does over 50% plant cover mean?

This means that when your plants reach their mature size, they will cover over 50% of the square footage of your conversion area. This can be calculated by taking the mature spread of the plant (indicated on the plant information tag), converting that into square footage and integrating that square foot coverage into your landscaping scheme. This requirement will not only curtail soil erosion, but also reduce the heat island generated by city living.

Do I have to use hardwood mulch for the native plant bed or can I use gravel, tumbled glass, decomposed granite, etc.?

The hardwood mulch is beneficial for moisture retention and weed control. If the plants you opt to install are classified as very low water use in the Grow Green guide, you may use alternate top cover. If you use anything other than wood mulch for your plant beds, a weed barrier must be installed and topped with at least 1" the alternate cover. Please remember that gravel/stone mulch in plant beds can increase soil temperatures and may damage the plants.

Can I put a path through the converted area?

Yes, a path may be included in the converted area. Please adjust your irrigation heads to not spray on the path. Also, you will want to put weed barrier fabric underneath the path so that weeds or grass do not establish.

Do I need to install edging?

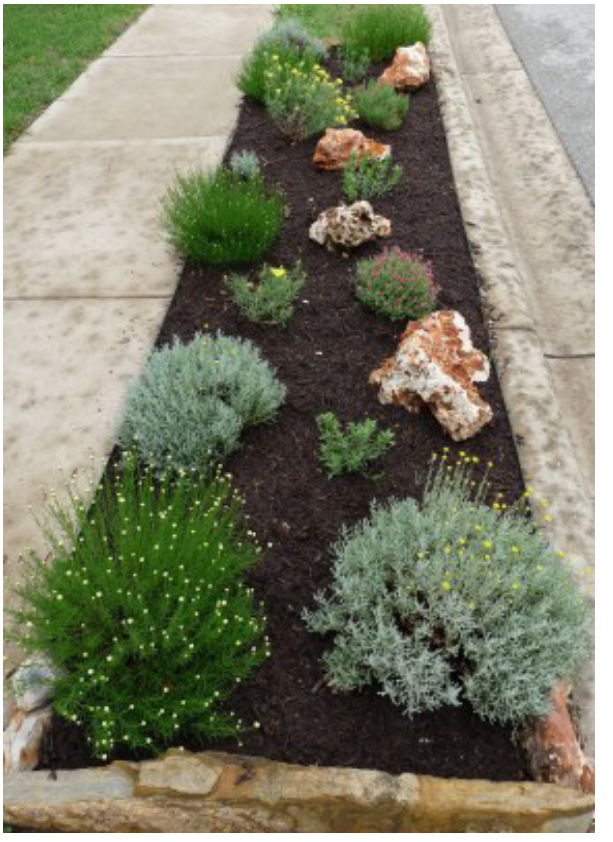
Edging is not required; however, it is great for weed control as well as providing a sense of permanence to a planter bed. There are many different materials and methods available, a simple 6" wide shallow trench or stones gathered during excavation are both low cost and effective ways to edge your garden.

Can I install artificial turf or permeable concrete?

These items are not eligible for the rebate under this program.

Can the area between the sidewalk and street be converted?

Yes, however, please be aware that this area is typically a public Right of Way and/or a Utility Easement. In the event that official work needs to be performed within this area, all repairs to the landscaping will be at the expense of the homeowner. For the safety of pedestrians, if you choose to convert this area, please consider installing plants without thorns or spikes.
In an effort to reduce curb and storm drain maintenance, gravel or stone beds proposed in the public Right of Way will not be counted in the square footage of your conversion area unless the material is over 1" in diameter.



Planting between the curb and sidewalk.

How much water will I save?

It is difficult to measure exactly how much water you may be able to save. Savings will depend on your current watering habits, the existing type of turf and your specific site conditions. As a general rule, turf requires 1" of water every week in the summer months. For similar site conditions a mature established native bed will only require about ½" - ¾" of water every other week in the summer months. For a 500 sq.ft. turf area that uses 1,240 gallons of water a month to stay healthy, converting to a WaterWise landscape could save you up to 930 gallons a month.

Can I convert St. Augustine to a more drought tolerant grass?

While Buffalo, Bermuda and Zoysia grasses are more drought tolerant than most varieties of St. Augustine, our experience has shown that many property owners continue to apply excessive water to keep these grasses green during their natural dormant periods. We will continue to monitor new varieties of turf and results from pilot studies to determine if we can consider "drought tolerant" turf in our WaterWise Landscape program. However, water savings from these types of conversions are not reliable enough to offer a rebate at this time.

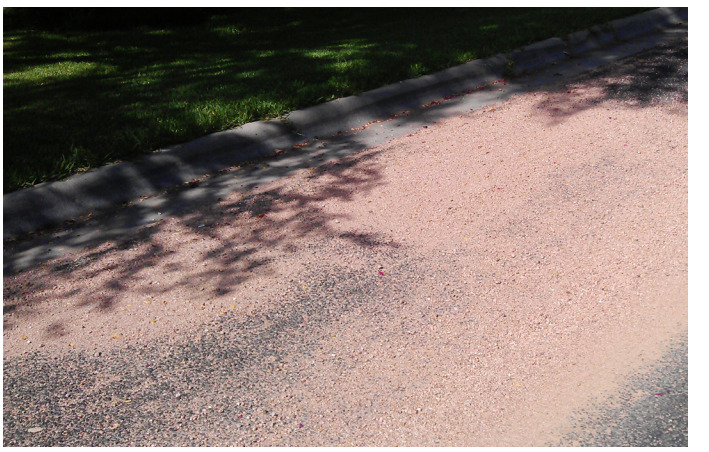
What plants may be installed in a gravel/stone bed?

If you decide to include plants in a gravel/stone bed, only plants that truly thrive with no supplemental irrigation after initial establishment will be your best bet. The best examples of these plants include Cacti, Succulents, Yuccas, Agaves and Sotols. If you have questions regarding these types of plants, it is recommended you contact us to verify your selection prior to purchase.

When will I receive my incentive check?

You should receive your check within 4-6 weeks of project completion. No incentive checks will be issued prior to October 1st (for fall installations) regardless of completion date.

This is an example of large and small gravel in the right of way. Smaller gravel was washed out with large storm event.



Example small gravel creating problems for street cleaning and storm drains.

What if I already started?

The WaterWise Landscape program is not retroactive; any work started prior to receiving approval from Austin Water will not qualify for the WaterWise Landscape program rebate. This helps us ensure that we are offering incentives to landscapes with the greatest potential to save water.

Austin WATER
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For information on more ways you can conserve water, visit

www.WaterWiseAustin.org

For utility locations call before you dig, toll-free (800) DIG-TESS (344-8377)