

WHAT IS A WATERWISE LANDSCAPE?

It's a landscape or garden that uses techniques to reduce or end the need for extra watering. This includes:

- Adding compost and/or mulch to keep soil moist and prevent water loss from evaporation.
- Changing irrigation heads to drip or low-flow nozzles.
- Planting native or adaptive plants with lower water needs.

HOW MUCH WATER WILL I SAVE?

Water savings depend on your watering habits, existing turf, and specific site conditions. Generally, turf needs 1 inch of water every week in the summer. A mature native bed would need only about ½ to ¾ inch of water every other week. If a 500 sq. foot turf area needs 1,240 gallons of water a month to stay healthy, converting to a WaterWise landscape could save up to 930 gallons a month.

WHAT DOES “75% HEALTHY TURF” MEAN AND WHY IS IT REQUIRED?

This program helps customers keep a healthy and attractive landscape while reducing water use. If you aren't watering your yard on a regular basis, this program is unlikely to help you save water. While not all lawns are the same, 75% of each conversion area should have healthy turf grass. Dead lawns will not qualify. Austin Water will consider thinning/dormant grass during a seasonal change but may need to do a site visit to verify its condition.



Healthy Lawn



Lawn Needing Pre-inspection



Lawn That Will Not Qualify

WHAT IF I ALREADY STARTED WORK?

Any work started before getting approval from Austin Water will not qualify. This helps us to be sure that we offer rebates to landscapes with the greatest potential to save water.

HOW DO I REMOVE TURF GRASS AND WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTERWARDS?

It is important to completely remove the grass to keep it from coming back. You have several options:

- Using sod cutters to remove it below its roots
- Using a tiller to break it into clumps
- Smothering it with newspaper/cardboard
- Solarizing it.

Your budget and effort will determine which is best for you. The next step is to till the plant bed area down 6 inches. You can add an inch of soil amended with compost into this to add nutrients and ensure that area retains water. Residential customers who convert to gravel or plain mulch beds must put weed barrier fabric on top of the soil before adding hardscape.

WHAT IS SOLARIZATION?

Solarization uses the heat of the soil and sun to bake 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 it will sun-burn and die.

WHAT ABOUT BERMUDA GRASS? IT KEEPS COMING BACK.

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



Example of Solarization

WHY DO I HAVE TO MAKE CHANGES TO MY AUTOMATIC SPRINKLER SYSTEM?

Spray heads that water turf grass are inefficient for watering native plants. If you do not plan to cap off irrigation in the converted area, we recommend changing it to drip. Drip irrigation loses less water to evaporation and is [exempt from the water restrictions](#).

WHY DO I HAVE TO TILL THE SOIL AND ADD 1 INCH OF COMPOST TO MY PLANT BEDS OUTSIDE THE DRIP LINE OF TREES?

Tilling the soil with compost helps keep water in the root zone of your plant beds. This is a benefit we need for our harsh dry summers. “For every 1% organic matter content, each cubic foot of soil can hold an additional 1.5 quarts of plant-available water” (*Sullivan, 2002*).

MAY I INSTALL MULCH BEDS AT ANY TIME OR DO I HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE INSTALLATION PERIOD?

You may begin installing the mulch hardscape portions after Austin Water approves your conversion. You may only install plant material during the spring and fall installation windows.

WHY DO I HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE FALL OR SPRING TO INSTALL PLANTS?

Plants go through a lot of stress during installation. Intense summer heat and dry conditions make it a struggle to keep them healthy. In spring and fall, evaporation rates are lower and we receive more rainfall.

WHAT SHOULD I PLANT IN THE FALL VS THE SPRING?

Fall is great for planting trees, shrubs, cacti, succulents and many perennials. This encourages root growth over the winter and gives you a head start in the spring. Spring is great for planting flowering perennials. They will have gone through one winter dormancy at the nursery. This fosters quicker establishment once in the ground. In either season, be sure to complete your landscape by the deadline. This gives it time to become established before winter freezes or summer heat. To help your new landscape thrive, select plants carefully and use proper planting techniques. For more information, check out [Grow Green](#).

CAN I USE NATIVE PLANTS THAT ARE NOT LISTED IN THE GROW GREEN GUIDE?

Other native or adaptive plants can thrive here beyond those listed in the [Grow Green Plant Guide](#). If you have specific plants in mind, include a list with your application or contact us to see if they qualify.

WHAT DOES “OVER 50% PLANT COVER” MEAN?

It means the plants will cover over half of the conversion area once they reach mature size. This decreases erosion and reduces the heat island generated by city living. To calculate plant cover, take the mature spread of the plant (*found on its information tag*) and convert it to square feet. Then, integrate that square foot coverage into your landscaping plan.

CAN I PUT GRAVEL IN THE CONVERTED AREA?

Residential customers may include a gravel path (*up to 3 feet in width*) in the converted area. Put weed barrier fabric underneath the path so that weeds or grass do not establish. Also, adjust irrigation heads so they don't spray the path. A gravel or stone patio area is also acceptable up to 200 square feet. Multi-family Homeowners Association applicants may not use gravel or stone in the conversion area.

DO I NEED TO INSTALL EDGING?

Edging is not required; but it is great for weed control as well as providing a sense of permanence to a planter bed. Many different materials and methods are available. A simple 6-inch wide shallow trench or some stones are low cost and effective ways to edge your garden.

CAN I INSTALL A WATER FEATURE IN THE CONVERTED AREA?

No water features are allowed within the conversion area.

CAN I INSTALL ARTIFICIAL TURF OR PERMEABLE CONCRETE?

These items are not eligible for the rebate.

CAN I CONVERT THE AREA BETWEEN THE SIDEWALK AND STREET?

Residential customers may convert this area. But, know that this is often a public Right of Way and/or a Utility Easement. If official work occurs in this area, landscaping repairs will be at homeowner expense. For pedestrian safety, please use plants without thorns or spikes. Multi-family Homeowners Association applicants may not do any conversions in the right-of-way.

CAN I CONVERT ST. AUGUSTINE TO A MORE DROUGHT TOLERANT GRASS?

Buffalo, Bermuda and Zoysia grasses are more drought tolerant than most St. Augustine varieties. But, water savings from these types of conversions are not reliable. People often water these grasses excessively to keep them green in their dormant periods. We will continue to track new turf varieties and pilot study results to see if we can include “drought tolerant” turf in the program later.



Planting Between the Curb and Sidewalk

WHEN WILL I RECEIVE MY REBATE?

You should receive it within 6-8 weeks of project completion. We do not issue checks before October 1st (*for fall installations*) regardless of completion date.