Landscape Conservation Guidelines

These guidelines can be adopted through ordinance, deed restriction or covenant where allowed by federal, state and local laws and regulations.

General

The Landscape Conservation Guidelines are modeled after the "Sensible Landscaping for Central Texas" guidebook for home builders and homeowners adopted by the Homebuilders Association of Greater Austin (http://www.hbaaustin.com) with significant input from LCRA. The guidelines are meant to provide builders and homeowners with a well-designed, water-efficient landscape.

Design

A. Turf shall not be planted on more than 50%, or up to 5,000 square feet, of the landscape. Longer leafed native grasses and wildflowers that use low amounts of water are not considered turf grass in this context.

B. Automatic spray irrigation for each home/business shall be limited to two times the foundation footprint, with a 10,000-square-foot maximum. The footprint may include both the house and the garage, but not the driveway or patio.

Soil

A. There shall be no less than **6 inches** of high-quality topsoil in planted areas.

B. Topsoil shall be native soil from the site, or fertile, friable, blended soil/compost blend. Topsoil shall not be of any admixture of subsoil or slag and shall be free of stones over 1.5 inches in diameter, lumps, refuse, plants or their roots, sticks, noxious weeds, salts, soil sterilants, or other material detrimental to plant growth. If topsoil is delivered, it shall be obtained from a well-drained site that is free of flooding. Topsoil shall not be delivered or spread while in a muddy condition.

C. Non-native topsoil shall contain not less than 25% organic matter (compost) that is blended through the soil.

D. Topsoil that is added to the site shall be incorporated into the existing surface in a 2- to 3-inch scarified transition layer to enable water to drain adequately through the different types of soil. Do not scarify within the drip line of existing trees that will be retained.

Irrigation

A. Automated irrigation systems shall not be required in any new landscape. However, if irrigation is installed it shall meet the guidelines outlined in this section.

B. All irrigation systems shall be installed in accordance with state law, Title 2 Texas Water Code, Chapter 34, and Title 30 Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 344 rules, as regulated and enforced by TCEQ. Irrigation contractors who install the irrigation systems must be TCEQ-licensed irrigators.

C. Drip irrigation shall be used for all irrigated landscaped areas, excluding turf. Use point source emitters for trees and shrubs and drip tubes at a depth of 2 inches below the surface for ground cover plants. Do not irrigate turf with drip irrigation. Instead use pressure regulating multi-stream irrigation to irrigate turf, when possible.

D. Areas planted with turf shall be in separate zones from areas planted with shrubs, trees or perennials.

E. All areas that are irrigated automatically shall be in hydrozones with plants with similar watering needs.

F. All automatic irrigation systems are required to have a rain sensor, a soil moisture sensor and/or a weather sensor connected to an irrigation controller to stop an irrigation cycle during and after a rainfall event. Rain sensors are to be installed in a location where rainfall is unobstructed. Rain sensors should be adjusted at the 1/4-inch setting.

G. Sprinkler irrigation is prohibited in median strips, parking islands and all landscape areas less than 10 feet from curb to curb or 10 feet in width. Areas less than 10 feet curb-to-curb or 10 feet in width can be irrigated with low-volume irrigation. Low-volume irrigation (subsurface drip irrigation or drip irrigation) shall be installed in long landscape strips less than 10 feet in width to avoid runoff and overspray onto the hardscape.

H. All new residential irrigation systems are required to have pressure regulation where static operating pressure does not exceed the sprinkler manufacturer's recommended operating range to eliminate extensive misting. These should include in-line pressure regulators, flow control valves or sprinkler devices equipped with pressure-regulating stems or nozzles.

I. Irrigation systems must have a WaterSense-labeled smart controller that features multiple start times, rain sensor capability, a water budget feature and a non-volatile memory in case of power outage.

J. Scheduling recommendations shall be posted inside or immediately near the controller enclosure box for easy reference.

K. Homeowners shall be provided with a complete irrigation plan (or as-built drawing) that describes the location of each irrigation zone, control valves and sprinkler devices.

L. Sprinkler systems shall be designed with no overspray onto the hardscape, include in-line check valves and sprinkler heads with check valves in irrigation zones located at the bottom of sloped terrain along curbs, sidewalks, driveways and other hardscapes. Systems also shall include devices that prevent low-head drainage after the sprinkler zone is turned off.

M. Post-installation inspections are required of all newly installed in-ground irrigation systems.

Plant Choice

A. Plants used must be native and drought tolerant. The City of Austin's Plant Guide (www.austintexas.gov/watershed-protection/plant-guide) can be used as a reference for appropriate plants.

B. Turf grasses should be limited to low water use turfs. Do not plant St. Augustine grass.

C. Invasive plants shall not be used. The Plant Guide can be used as a reference for invasive plants to avoid.

Plant Prepping, Placement and Spacing

A. A hole dug for the plant or tree should be two to three times wider than the container or root ball in which the plant is being stored, ensuring water is able to be absorbed by the plant's roots.

B. Existing soil should be blended with compost before sodding or seeding with the recommended turfgrass.

C. Proper plant placement and spacing is critical to plant health and long-term landscape quality. Placing plants too close to buildings can cause problems with plant disease, as well as insect and structural problems. Proper plant spacing ensures good air flow and room for plants to mature without crowding. Consider the mature height and width of plants before planting them.

Mulch

A. All areas planted with trees, perennials and shrubs shall be finished with a **2- to 4-inch-deep** layer of high-quality 50/50 blend of organic mulch and compost blend.

B. Wood chip mulch shall be clean wood chips free of man-made debris, shredded into coarse pieces ranging from 1 to 3 inches.

C. Rock mulch shall only be used in small areas such as planting beds with succulents that are less than 20% of the landscape, areas without irrigation requirements such as pathways, or in a 5-foot area directly surrounding a house to comply with FireWise principles. Rock mulch can increase heat effect and require more water on planted beds.

Maintenance

A. Replenish mulch/compost blend in non-turf areas every two years at a minimum. Doing so during the fall and spring is recommended.

B. Aerate turfgrass within the first year of construction and twice a year after that (about Oct. 1 and March 1).

C. Top dress turfgrass areas with quality compost twice a year (about Oct. 1 and March 1) at a depth of 1/4-inch to 1/2-inch following the aeration and drag or rake it into the canopy and aeration holes.

D. Mow turf no shorter than 3-4 inches for turf health and water retention.

E. Set the automatic irrigation system back to a normal schedule after the establishment period.

New Pool Construction Standards

A. Private residential swimming pools shall not be installed with sand media filters.
B. Pool water features installed with public swimming pools or private residential swimming pools must be designed so the water feature can be turned off without affecting the filtering capabilities of the pool. Automatic pool fill features must be designed so they can be turned off in both public and private residential swimming pools.
C. Pools with shared water between the pool and spa shall be designed so water can be shared without the necessity of an above-ground water feature that cannot be turned off. If a water feature between the spa and the pool exists, the default setting will be for it to be turned off.
D. Automatic pool fill features must include an automatic pool shut-off feature.
E. Vanishing or negative edge pools must be designed with catch basins large enough to prevent splashing that leads to increased water use.
F. Backwash systems must be designed so they may be turned off.
G. Pool skimmers should be managed in such a way as to minimize water consumption. The range of allowable water within the skimmer fill range should allow for several inches of evaporative loss prior to filling.
H. All residential swimming pools shall have a hose-end timer installed at the nearest hose bib location. In addition, a hose bib back-flow prevention device must be connected to the hose bib fixtures nearest to the pool.
I. All residential swimming pools shall be installed with a permanent automatic pool cover to minimize evaporative loss when not in use.