

**CHAPTER VII. LANDSCAPING STANDARDS**

**Sec. 13-101. PURPOSE**

- (a) It is the purpose of this chapter to establish reasonable requirements and standards for the design, installation, water conservation, and maintenance of landscape and irrigation to:
- (1) Enhance the aesthetic appearance of the City by providing standards relating to quality, quantity, and functional aspects of landscaping for developments in all areas of the City.
  - (2) Address water conservation measures through the landscape and irrigation design.
  - (3) Encourage sustainable landscapes through landscape techniques that conserve, recycle, and reuse the resources that are invested in landscapes.
  - (4) Encourage landscape design that protects public health, safety, and welfare by minimizing the impact of all forms of physical and visual pollution, erosion, and unsightly conditions. This includes promoting the use of canopy trees in parking lots, and limiting the overall use of palm trees.
  - (5) Deter graffiti on walls, break up continuous asphalt and/or concrete surfaces on existing properties, screen incompatible land uses, cool and shade vehicles and hardscape areas, preserve the integrity of neighborhoods, and enhance pedestrian and vehicular corridors.
  - (6) Encourage applicants to take full advantage of the wide range of drought tolerant landscape materials and low water flow irrigation systems available within the framework established by this chapter.
  - (7) Establish water efficient landscape regulations, pursuant to State Assembly Bill 1881 and as effective as the State Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance.
  - (8) Promote the design, installation, and maintenance of landscaping in a manner that conserves regional water resources by ensuring that landscaping projects are not unduly water-needy and that irrigation systems are appropriately implemented to minimize water waste.
  - (9) Refer to the "Water Efficient Landscape Guidelines" adopted by City Council Resolution No. 10-2 to provide procedural and design guidance for project applicants for specified landscape installation or rehabilitation projects except for the R1 (single-family residential) district.

**Sec. 13-101.1 APPLICABILITY**

- (a) The provisions of this chapter apply to all zoning districts in the City.
- (b) Landscaping and irrigation which is a part of a registered historical site, public park, or golf course facility, or new or rehabilitated cemeteries may be exempted from the provisions of this chapter when deemed necessary and appropriate by the planning division and consistent with the state's requirements.
- (c) The Water Efficient Landscape Guidelines shall apply to projects that meet the following criteria unless exempted pursuant to the Water Efficiency Landscape Guidelines:
1. New landscape installations or landscape rehabilitation projects in nonresidential zones (except for cemeteries) with a landscaped area equal to or greater than 2,500 square feet.
  2. New landscape installations or landscape rehabilitation projects in multi-family residential zones with a landscaped area equal to or greater than 2,500 square feet.
  3. New golf courses and parks.
  4. Modified landscaped area greater than 2,500 square feet affecting at least 50 percent of the total landscaped area; and planned to occur within one year.

**Sec. 13-102. DEFINITIONS**

The following words, terms and phrases, when used in this chapter, shall have the meanings ascribed to them in this section, except where the context clearly indicates a different meaning.

**Canopy trees.** Deciduous and evergreen trees that have spreading branches, creating rounded- or flattened-shaped crowns, and which provide shade from the sun. Canopy trees provide a better shade coverage than columnar-shaped trees or palms.

**Compost.** Biologically decomposed organic material which includes grass clippings, leaves and other garden debris and which may also contain vegetable and fruit refuse.

**Deciduous.** Any plant that sheds all of its leaves at one time each year (usually fall) is deciduous.

**Drip Line.** The circle that could be drawn on the soil around a tree directly under the tips of its outermost branches.

**Drought tolerant plant material.** Those plants that tolerate heavy clay to sandy soils with use of limited supplemental water. The plants are able to thrive with deep, infrequent watering once their root systems are established (3-12 month average time period). Plants include those that naturally grow in areas of limited natural water supply (native and non-native plant species) and are adaptable to weather and soil conditions prevalent in Costa Mesa.

**Dry landscape materials.** Substances originating from a living organism, such as mulch and ground bark, and natural landscape design elements, such as boulders and dry bed streams.

**Espalier.** A tree or shrub trained so that its branches grow in a flat pattern against a wall or fence, on a trellis, or along horizontal wires.

**Evergreen.** An evergreen plant never loses all its leaves at one time.

**Hydroseeding.** A commercial method of turf or groundcover seed application which is sprayed onto soil prepared for planting. Hydroseeding is a slurry of seeds, soil amendments, and fertilizer, and is usually used on large, open areas.

**Invasive plants.** Plants that have aggressive growing and/or rooting characteristics which allow the plants or their roots to penetrate into other planting areas, such as turf, and groundcover, or into hardscape areas, such as sidewalks, curbs, and streets (usually to compete for water).

**Low water flow irrigation.** A system of watering plant material using drip/trickle, reduced water emitting devices, low precipitation heads, soaker lines, or other similar mechanisms, which restricts the amount of water in gallons per minute to allow for deep percolation into the soil. The low water flow irrigation system, combined with watering practices outlined in this chapter, will reduce water loss through evaporation, wind drift and overwatering.

**Mulch.** Shredded or chipped wood from tree branches and trunks and from uncontaminated wood products or lumber; this material is often mixed with leaves and grass clippings for optimal effect.

**Pruning.** Skilled cuts, as defined by International Society of Arborists (ISA) standards, on established plants for purposes of maintaining plant health (removal of dead, diseased, or injured wood); controlling or directing growth; increasing quality or yield of flowers or fruit; or training young plants to position their main branches or to ensure strong structure. Pruning involves minor cutting to minimize plant decay, and to retain the natural shape of the plant, except as applied to formal hedges, espalier, and topiary.

**Thinning.** A form of pruning involving the removal of lateral branches at their point of origin or the shortening of a branch to a smaller later branch, in order to open the plant (usually a tree) to sunlight while accentuating its natural form.

**Topiary.** A technique of pruning and training shrubs and trees into formalized shapes resembling such things as animals and geometric figures.

**Topping or heading back.** A severe form of pruning, involving the cutting of current or 1-year-old growth to a bud, or cutting older branches back to a stub or a tiny twig.

**Turf.** (Also known as lawn) A thick-matted groundcover material consisting of one or several types of grasses, which is grown on open space areas (for active or passive use) or as a groundcover. To look its

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best, and because most grasses withstand heavy foot-traffic, turf is usually kept mowed.

**Uncontaminated wood products.** Materials made from untainted or non-chemically treated wood or lumber that have been chipped or shredded into mulch or bark.

### Sec. 13-103. GENERAL PROVISIONS AND SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

- (a) **Requirements:** Landscape and irrigation plans shall be required for all development projects requiring discretionary land use approval and for all City-initiated projects. For landscape projects subject to the Water Efficiency Landscape Guidelines, landscape plans shall be prepared and certified by a California licensed landscape architect.
- (b) **Process:**
- (1) The plans shall be submitted to and approved by the planning division prior to issuance of any building permits, and shall be prepared in accordance with requirements listed in this chapter, Water Efficiency Landscape Guidelines (as applicable) and the City's Streetscape and Median Development Standards, which are incorporated herein by this reference, and which may be amended from time to time by resolution of the City Council. All unpaved areas shall be planted with an effective combination of trees, groundcover, turf, shrubbery and/or approved dry landscape materials.
  - (2) Landscape and irrigation plans shall be fully dimensioned and shall include, but shall not be limited to, the following:
    - a. List of plants (common and Latin names)
    - b. Plant size
    - c. Location
    - d. Irrigation plan
    - e. Hardscape (sidewalks, driveways, 6" continuous concrete curbing)
    - f. Water elements
    - g. Decorative features (boulders, sculptures, arbors, etc.)
    - h. Planting and irrigation details
    - i. Maintenance information
    - j. Any other information deemed necessary by the planning division
  - (3) **Modifications:** Any modification to an approved landscape or irrigation plan must be approved by the planning division prior to installation of the landscaping or irrigation system.
  - (4) **Approval:** All plan approvals are subject to and dependent upon the applicant complying with all applicable ordinances, codes, regulations, and adopted policies. All landscape plans for projects subject to the Water Efficiency Landscape Guidelines shall be prepared under the direction of a California licensed landscape architect.
  - (5) All landscaping and irrigation materials shall be properly installed, inspected, and maintained in a healthy condition, prior to release of building utilities or the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, whichever is applicable or occurs first. Final inspection approvals or occupancy clearance shall not be granted until all of the landscaping and irrigation are installed in accordance with the approved plans.
  - (6) **Conflicting code sections:** When the provisions of this chapter conflict with other sections of the Municipal Code, the more stringent shall apply.

### Sec. 13-104. LANDSCAPE PLAN OBJECTIVES

- (a) Each landscape plan shall be compatible with the shape and topography of the site and architectural characteristics of structure(s) on the site. Each landscape plan shall be compatible with the character of adjacent landscaping, provided the quality of the adjacent landscaping meets the standard of these guidelines. However, it is not the intent of this section to require the use of identical plant materials or landscape designs. Where existing mature landscaping is in good, healthy condition, every effort shall be made to retain trees and mature landscaping.
- (b) Each landscape plan shall illustrate a concern for design elements such as balance, scale, texture, form, water conservation, and unity.

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- (c) Each landscape plan shall address the functional aspects of landscaping such as grading, drainage, minimal runoff, erosion prevention, wind barriers, provisions for shade and reduction of glare, and water conservation. Each landscape plan shall demonstrate a concern for solar access, including exposure and shading of window areas.
- (d) Landscaping shall be used to relieve solid, unbroken elevations, soften continuous wall expanses and deter graffiti.
- (e) Landscaping shall be required to screen storage areas, trash enclosures, parking areas, public utilities, freeways, highways, and other similar land uses or elements which do not contribute to the enhancement of the surrounding area. Where possible, planting islands and perimeter landscaping shall be designed as concave-shaped swales instead of convex-shaped berms in order to capture runoff and reduce dependence on water. If mounding or berms are required as part of a project, the slopes shall not exceed a 3:1 (horizontal:vertical) ratio, nor shall they exceed 3 feet in height. Where plants are required for screening, such screening shall consist of the use of evergreen shrubs (minimum 5 gallons), vines and/or evergreen trees closely spaced.
- (f) Water elements (pools, ponds, fountains, and other similar ornamental water features) incorporated into the project shall be of a design, shape, and size that minimizes water loss through evaporation. Recirculating water shall be used for decorative water features.
- (g) Landscape and irrigation plans shall be designed and implemented to meet the water conservation measures described in the Water Efficient Landscape Guidelines as applicable.

### Sec. 13-105. LANDSCAPING REQUIREMENTS

- (a) All required setbacks abutting a public right-of-way shall be landscaped (except for walks and driveways which provide access from a public right-of-way).
- (b) Except in residential, and institutional and recreational zones, parking areas shall be landscaped pursuant to the following standards:
  - (1) **Commercial zones, including planned development commercial:** 25 square feet of irrigated landscaping shall be provided for each parking space provided other than spaces within a parking structure.

**Exception:** In the TC (Town Center) district, all parking areas not within parking structures shall be provided with irrigated landscaping at the rate of 15 square feet per parking space. Included in the required landscaping shall be one tree for every 8 surface parking spaces.
  - (2) **Industrial zones, including planned development industrial:** 15 square feet of irrigated landscaping shall be provided for each parking space provided other than spaces within a parking structure.
  - (2A) **Mixed-use overlay zone:** Landscaping should predominately consist of California native plants and should be provided as described in the appropriate Urban Plan document.
  - (3) **All zones:** Landscaping shall be distributed throughout the parking area and shall be in addition to the required street setback landscaping.
  - (4) **Parking structure landscape requirements:** In lieu of the required square footage of landscaping per space, parking structures shall be developed with perimeter landscaping under the direction of the planning division. The landscaping shall consist of tall-growing canopy trees, with a tree size mix as follows: One tree for every 100 sq. ft. of perimeter landscape area: 30%, 15 gallon trees; 50%, 24-inch box trees; and 20%, 36-inch or greater box trees. In addition, landscaping shall be provided on the upper levels of parking structures with more than 2 parking levels, when these structures are visible from public streets. Perimeter planter boxes, with provisions for drainage, shall be permanently mounted or designed into the structure, incorporating cascading plants. A drip irrigation system, on an automatic timer shall be used to irrigate the plant material.
- (c) Perimeter landscaping adjacent to property lines is encouraged in parking areas. Planter area curbs are encouraged to be used in place of wheel stops.

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- (d) All landscaping shall be separated from parking and vehicular circulation areas by a raised, continuous 6-inch Portland cement concrete curb. Alternative designs which accomplish the same purpose may be approved by the planning division.
- (e) The planning division may require landscaping in excess of the minimum area specified for a proposed development, provided the additional landscaping is necessary to:
  - (1) Screen adjacent uses from parking areas, activities, storage or structures that could cause a negative impact on adjacent uses based on aesthetics, noise, odors, etc.; or
  - (2) Provide landscaping that is compatible with neighboring uses; or
  - (3) Provide landscaping (shrub or vine) to deter placement of graffiti on walls.
- (f) Landscaping located in proximity to street intersections, or where a driveway intersects a sidewalk, shall conform to the "Walls, Fences, and Landscaping" standards which are established by resolution of the city council.
- (g) It shall be unlawful to plant, maintain, or allow to exist any thorn-bearing plant material contiguous to any public right-of-way.
- (h) In all residential zones, except R-1, landscape parkways with a combined width of 10 feet, but not less than 3 feet on one side, shall be provided along the sides of interior private streets and/or common driveways. The parkway on the house side of private streets or common driveways shall be a minimum of 5 feet in width.

### Sec. 13-106. REQUIRED LANDSCAPING MATERIALS

- (a) All required landscaped areas, including landscaped areas within parking lots, shall consist of drought tolerant plant material and shall meet the following minimum requirements:
  - (1) **Tree count:** One tree (15-gallon or larger) shall be provided for every 200 square feet of landscaped area. 50 percent of all trees shall be evergreen. 25 percent of the required trees shall be 24-inch box or larger. Canopy trees for parking lot areas shall be included in the tree calculation. Canopy trees shall be installed throughout parking lot areas at the ratio of one tree per 6 parking spaces, with an average of 36 square feet of planter area provided per tree. Upon written request, the number of required trees may be reduced by the planning division when it is determined that an alternative design will meet the intent of section 13-104, LANDSCAPE PLAN OBJECTIVES.
    - a. **Tree count exception:** One tree (minimum 24-inch box or larger) shall be provided for every 300 square feet of landscaped area for automobile dealerships.
  - (2) **Tree selection:** Trees shall be selected based on their suitability and sustainability in tree wells, narrow planters, and medians. Trees shall also be selected on the basis of quality and diversity as indicated below:
    - a. 24-inch box trees shall be a minimum 8 feet in height as measured from top of soil line in the box, and shall have a caliper of approximately 3 inches in diameter, 18 inches above the top of the root ball, or meeting with approval by the planning division. Selected trees shall be healthy, vigorous, and free from plant disease and insect pests. Selected trees shall be symmetrical and typical for variety and species. All trees shall have a normal and healthy root system free from being root bound. 15-gallon trees recently transplanted into 24-inch box, and 24-inch box recently transplanted into 36-inch box, and so forth, shall not be substituted for the required tree size.
    - b. Trees shall be selected from either the City's Recommended Street Tree Palette (Appendix B) or Private Property Tree Palette (Appendix D), included in the Streetscape and Median Development Standards. Trees not selected from these sources shall be approved or disapproved by the planning division based on the objectives in this chapter.
    - c. All trees shall be staked in accordance with standards contained in the Streetscape and Median Development Standards.
    - d. At least 2 different tree species shall be identified on plans and installed as part of the project landscaping.

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- e. Palm trees shall not be used in the landscaped street setback, except as an accent plant to highlight main driveway entrances, to accessorize the front of a building, or for unique or theme uses. Two palms shall constitute one tree in the ratio of required trees for required landscape areas. Palm trees shall not be used as a parking lot tree.
- (3) **Shrub count:** One shrub shall be provided for every 25 square feet of open space. 60 per cent of the required shrubs shall be a minimum of 5 gallons. Upon written request, the number of required shrubs may be reduced by the planning division when it is determined that an alternative design will meet the objectives in this chapter.
- (4) **Groundcover:** At least 70 per cent of all landscaped areas containing trees and shrubs shall be underplanted with groundcover, with the remaining areas to incorporate a minimum two-inch layer of uncontaminated compost or mulch. Decorative (commercial) bark is not acceptable. Groundcover shall be planted in a triangular-spaced pattern to ensure 100 percent coverage within one year of planting. A minimum 2-foot diameter clearance, measured from each tree trunk, shall be maintained free of groundcover or turf. Uncontaminated shredded mulch or compost shall be applied and maintained in these areas.
- (5) **Turf:** Turf incorporated into the landscape design shall not exceed 50 per cent of the total landscaping area. All turf shall be of a drought tolerant variety. Redwood headerboard, or other material acceptable by the planning division, shall be installed to separate turf from planter and groundcover areas.
- (b) Street trees located within the public parkway, or any public right-of-way, shall be approved by the public services department.
- (c) The plant material selected shall be suitable for the given soil and climate conditions. Plant selection shall take into consideration water conservation through appropriate use, and groupings of plants that are well adapted to particular sites and to particular watering needs, climatic, geological or topographical conditions.
- (d) Materials such as crushed rock, redwood chips, pebbles and stone are not satisfactory substitutes for live plant materials although their limited use may be approved by the planning division. Uncontaminated mulch, shredded bark, or compost may be used to fulfill part of the groundcover requirement as noted in section 13-106(a). Uncontaminated mulch, shredded bark, and/or compost used as a groundcover shall maintain a consistent 2-inch minimum layer and provide complete coverage under shrubs and trees.
- (e) Artificial plants are prohibited.
- (f) **Water Conservation:** For projects that are subject to Water Efficient Landscape Guidelines, landscape and irrigation plans shall meet all the specified requirements.

### Sec. 13-107. IRRIGATION REQUIREMENTS

- (a) All landscaped areas shall be provided with an approved irrigation system. Landscaped areas shall be provided with an automatically time-controlled sprinkler system when the site is zoned commercial or industrial, or when the site is zoned residential and permits more than 2 dwelling units.
- (b) **Irrigation system:** Irrigation system shall consist of underground piped water lines with low water flow sprinklers and/or a drip or trickle irrigation system. The system chosen shall be designed to provide adequate coverage to all plant material, existing and proposed. Water meter and line sizes shall be calculated from total water demand, which should be, at least, the sum of the maximum irrigation demand and all building demand. Due to varying irrigation requirements, separate control valves and/or sprinkler/emitter heads shall be used when shrubs and turf all appear on the same landscape plan. The irrigation system shall be designed so that overspray, runoff, and low-head drainage onto streets, sidewalks, windows, walls, and fences are minimized. Automatic systems for watering cycles shall be scheduled to maximize ground infiltration rates and further minimize runoff.
- (c) **Acceptable watering time:** Landscaped areas should be watered consistent with the requirements of the applicable water district to provide maximum benefit to the plant material and to reduce unnecessary water loss through drift and evaporation.
- (d) **Reclaimed water systems:** Irrigation systems for projects one acre or more in area shall use

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reclaimed water whenever such water is available to the site. The systems shall be subject to appropriate health standards and review by the applicable water agency.

### Sec. 13-108. LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

- (a) **Responsibility of the property owner:** The property owner is responsible for the maintenance of the landscaping on their property. Any dead, dying, or diseased trees, shrubbery, vines, groundcover, or turf, must be replaced within 60 days of written notice from the development services or public services departments. Tree stakes shall be removed when no longer needed to support the tree. Landscaping shall be maintained in an orderly and healthy condition. This shall include proper pruning according to International Society of Arborists (ISA) standards, mowing of lawns, weeding, removal of litter, fertilizing, replacement of plants when necessary, and application of appropriate quantities of water to all landscaped areas. Compost and/or mulch used as a groundcover shall maintain a consistent 2-inch minimum layer over soil.
- (b) **Tree pruning:** Topping or heading back of trees are unacceptable pruning methods because the severity of this type of pruning will ruin the natural shape of ornamental trees, and will generate weak new growth which is prone to breaking. The damage created by topping or heading back is difficult to correct. Topping or heading back shall not be used in-lieu of pruning or thinning.
- (c) **Tree removal:** Trees shall not be destroyed or removed without prior city approval. Site plans which identify existing and replacement trees shall be submitted to the planning division for review, along with written request and justification for the removal. Additionally, the planning division may require a report prepared by a California licensed arborist. Where possible, and under the direction of the planning division, replacement trees shall be of a size consistent with that to be removed. Trees may be replaced upon approval of plans by the planning division.
- (d) **Water conservation required:** Landscape maintenance practices shall be employed which foster long-term landscape water. The practices may include, but not be limited to, performing routine irrigation system repair and adjustments, scheduling irrigation based on the California Irrigation Management Information System, use of moisture-sensing or rain shut-off devices, conducting water audits and prescribing the amount of water applied per landscaped acre.
- (e) Violation of subsections (a-d) of this section shall be enforceable under section 1-33 of this Code, irrespective of the negligence or intent of the violator to cause, allow, or facilitate the destruction, improper maintenance, or removal of any trees, landscaping or irrigation.

