

Front Yard Landscape Design Guidelines for Water Wise Landscape Plan

In an effort to assist homeowners who want to change their landscape to a more drought tolerant Central Texas landscape, the Architectural Control Committee is setting the following design guidelines for front yards. The goal is to provide attractive and well maintained landscaping for Circle C front yards that enhance curb appeal while emphasizing water conservation.

Plan Submittal is Required

All homeowners who are substantially changing their front yard landscape are required to submit a landscape design plan to the Architectural Control Committee. Forms for the submission can be found at www.circlecranch.info, under the Resource Tab, and then under Committees.

The following items must be included in the plan:

- a) All front yard hard-scape items such as pathways, fountains, retaining walls, sidewalks, flower pots and any other permanent items.
- b) All proposed shrubs and flower beds, showing size and outline, edging locations, all mulch and/or rock areas showing size and outline, and a complete plant list for each bed area.
- c) All proposed turf areas.

Each plan is reviewed individually. The following Design Guidelines are used for uniformity and making aesthetic decisions to ensure a high quality landscape.

Design Guidelines for a Water Wise Landscape

Water Wise Landscapes provide an attractive alternative for those who are interested in water conservation. They retain green elements, are full of color and texture and provide an interesting area for humans and wildlife while contributing to water conservation.

1. Irrigation. The most effective irrigation systems will include drip irrigation in appropriate places. Many Circle C homes have automatic sprinkler systems. Portions of these systems can be converted to drip irrigation. We advise that you consult with a TCEQ licensed irrigation professional to set up the most efficient system. Additionally, your sprinkler system should be checked on a regular basis for missing heads, leaks, excessive runoff, or malfunctioning valves. All sprinkler systems should have a rain sensor and all homeowners are required to follow the City of Austin Watering Restrictions.

2. Plants and Trees. All plants and trees must be on the City of Austin Grow Green List. This is a comprehensive list and it can be found at www.ci.austin.tx.us/growgreen. This list will give you complete information on mature size of plants and trees, evergreen or deciduous, full sun or shade and amount of water they need.

2. Shade trees. According to the Circle C Conditions, Covenants and Restrictions, two shade trees are required for all front yards. If you have mature trees and wish to relocate a smaller tree, please indicate so on your plan. The best shade trees for the Circle C area are:

--Monterey Oak, Cedar Elm, Burr Oak, Chinquapin Oak, Lacey Elm, Live Oak

3. Decorative Trees. To enhance the shade in your yard and create excellent habitat for birds, understory or smaller decorative trees are encouraged. There are a number of smaller great trees for Circle C, and this is a matter of personal preference. The top decorative trees for the Circle C area are:

--Texas Mountain Laurel, Yaupon Holly, Desert Willow, Possumhaw Holly, Texas Redbud, Anacacho Orchid, Wax Myrtle, Central Texas Dogwood.

4. Planting beds. All beds must be defined and have an edge. The edge can be created with steel or plastic edging as long as the edging is installed properly below ground. Other options include beds edged with masonry, beds edged with native rock, or beds that have a "V" shaped trench to separate the bed from surrounding areas. All plants must be from the City of Austin Grow Green List.

--Bed shape should be curved and organic

--There should be a balanced amount of evergreen shrubs combined with flowering perennials

--Taller plants should be planted at the back, and shorter ones in front

--Plant in groups of odd number plants. Smaller plants should include a minimum of three plants of the same variety.

--Specimen plants may be featured as a structural focal point

--Annual plants are limited to flower pots

--All beds must be mulched 2" to 3"

--Beds under trees are allowed, clear mulch

5. Turf Areas. Although after this hot and dry summer, many homeowners would like to give up on turf, the proper type of turf, used selectively will enhance the majority of all front yards.

--No St. Augustine turf. If you have shady areas, create a nice bed, or mulch under a tree

--No more than 50% of the front yard should be planted in turf. The most important areas are next to hard surfaces such as driveways and sidewalks.

--Turf varieties. It is critical to get a turf variety that can survive hot and dry conditions.

These include:

Pallisades zoysia—will take moderate shade. Other varieties of zoysia are acceptable.

Bermuda grass—needs eight hours of sun

Buffalo grass—check on latest varieties which work better for residential lawns

--Turf installation. Eliminate existing grass, dig down and haul it off. Install a good grade of top soil that includes composted material. Soil should be weed free. You can buy good varieties of soil at neighboring nurseries such as the Natural Gardner and Geo Growers. Install up to four inches of good top soil. **This is the single most important step in having a sustainable low water turf.**

6. Natural Rock/Decomposed Granite areas. These areas can assist in your native landscape design by providing a dry creek look in selected areas. However, no front yards may be exclusively or predominately rock without plants, trees, and turf.

--Granite and rock areas must look natural and be used selectively to enhance the overall design

--Small pea gravel should not be used, it runs off during rainfall events.

--Minimum gravel size is 2"

--Gravel and rock must be tan to brown in color

--No recycled glass is allowed in the front yard

--Granite, rock or gravel may not replace all mulch in the front yard

7. Pathways. Pathways that meander naturally between beds or around the side of the front yard are allowed.

--pathways may be flagstone, decomposed granite, decomposed granite and rock, or concrete if approved

--pathways must be professionally constructed. If decomposed granite is used, pathways must have edging.

8. Mulch. All beds and tree wells must be mulched. Mulch should be 2" to 3" in depth, and turned and replenished regularly.

9. Side Strip. Many homeowners are unable to maintain a grass side strip between the curb and the sidewalk at the front of the lot. Here are a few things that will meet the guidelines:

--remove grass. If irrigation is present, change a few heads to bubblers or drip. Intersperse plants and surround them with flagstone, or a combination of decomposed granite and flagstone.

--use all flagstone or a combination of granite with flagstone across the strip with no irrigation or plants

--decomposed granite only will not be accepted.

10. Yard Art and Pots. Yard art is limited to two small pieces located within a bed that is part of the overall design. Excessive yard art including statuary, flags, gazing balls, birdbaths, weathervanes, and other non-vegetative items are encouraged in the back yard.

Pots that are an integral part of the landscape will be allowed in a limited capacity.

Artificial grass, plants and flowers are not allowed in the front yard.

11. Maintenance.

All Water Wise front yards must be maintained according to the Conditions, Covenants and Restrictions of the Circle C Homeowners Association. Yards must be regularly mowed and edged, beds must be free of weeds, mulch must be replenished and all yards need to look neat and tidy. Dead plant materials should be promptly removed, and shrubs, trees and perennials need to be pruned according to what is appropriate for the plant.

12. Resources

Here are websites that will assist you in coming up with a great front yard design. If you don't want to do it yourself, you can also hire a landscape architect or a landscape designer to work with you on developing a plan.

Website resources:

City of Austin Grow Green Program. www.ci.austin.tx.us/growgreen

Texas A & M Horticulture and Extension www.aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/
Program

Texas Forest Service
(Tree Planting Guide) <http://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/>

13. Examples

Please see Low Water Front Yard Design Photos for examples of acceptable designs.