

# Water-Wise Landscaping Ordinances

In the Texas Hill Country, up to 70% of potable water is used for landscaping, especially in the summer. This presents a huge opportunity to conserve water by shifting landscaping practices in the region. **By implementing landscaping ordinances that promote water-wise landscapes, cities can achieve huge water savings and maximize the long-term sustainability of the community's water resources and outdoor spaces.**

This guide is part of the “Leading by Example” guidebook, which can be found online at: [hillcountryalliance.org/leadingbyexample/](http://hillcountryalliance.org/leadingbyexample/).

## BEST PRACTICES

**Require new developments to choose landscaping plants from an approved list of drought-tolerant plants.** The City of Austin's code includes a great example of native and adapted plants in their Preferred Plant List, though adapting the list is appropriate for different parts of the Hill Country.

**Require irrigation efficiency measures** such as setting day limits, installing smart controllers, and incorporating rain sensors. The City of San Marcos' code provides a good example of effective irrigation management through these practices.

**Focus on new developments and residences.** By requiring that landscapes in *new* developments and residences use drought-tolerant plant species and efficient irrigation systems, cities are taking a proactive approach that is more cost-effective than retrofitting systems down the road.

**Compliment regulation with incentive programs targeting existing landscaping.** The City of Austin offers rebates to help homeowners convert healthy turf grass to native plant beds and install rainwater harvesting systems. San Marcos offers rebates for rainwater harvesting, irrigation upgrades, and soil improvements.

### BENEFITS OF LANDSCAPE ORDINANCES

- WATER CONSERVATION
- COST SAVINGS
- INCREASED CURB APPEAL
- HEALTHIER ECOSYSTEMS



Contrary to popular belief, drought-tolerant landscapes can be very green, with major curb appeal.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANA KIRBY

## EXAMPLE ORDINANCES

### SAN MARCOS, TX (SEC. 14.126)

- **Requires separate meters for landscape irrigation** and a master valve on new irrigation systems to prevent leaks.
- **Restricts turf grass areas** to 50% of landscaped areas for single-family residential homes, and 25% of landscaped areas in all other developments. Turf grass areas must be planted in drought-tolerant species approved by the city.
- **Allows use of reclaimed water for irrigation.**

### AUSTIN, TX (ENVIRONMENTAL CRITERIA MANUAL, SEC. 2)

- Requires that new commercial sites choose plants from a **Preferred Plant List** for at least 90% of landscaped areas.
- **Restricts use of potable water for irrigation on commercial sites.** 50% of landscaped area must be undisturbed natural area or be irrigated by rainwater or stormwater runoff conveyed from impervious surfaces on the site.
- **Permanently restricts irrigation to once-per-week watering** for automatic irrigation, though a 40-day variance applies if installing new low-water use turf grasses and plants.

## RESOURCES

**City of Austin** and **Texas A&M AgriLife Extension** have produced a comprehensive guide to native and adapted plants for Central Texas lawns.

- ▶ [\*Native and Adapted Landscape Plants: an earthwise guide for Central Texas\*](#)

**Texas Living Waters Project** conducted a statewide analysis of the water savings potential of reducing outdoor watering. It is estimated that homeowners overwater their lawns by two to three times the amount needed. See the full report below.

- ▶ [\*Water Conservation by the Yard: A Statewide Analysis of Outdoor Water Savings Potential\*](#)