



# LANDSCAPING REQUIREMENTS

Landscaping contributes to community aesthetics, property values, shading, stormwater management, and even conservation of water and protection of habitat. For more details on landscaping, irrigation and usable open space requirements, see **SMC 19.37**.

Landscaping requirements include minimum standards for:

- Landscaped areas and useable open space
- Parking lot and perimeter landscaping
- Tree surveys and protection measures
- Water-efficient landscaping design (see sidebar)
- Planting, soil management and water features
- Irrigation systems

## LANDSCAPED AREAS

Landscaping is defined as any combination of trees, ground cover, shrubs, vines, flowers or lawns. Landscaping may also include rock, stone, structural or decorative features such as fountains, reflecting pools, art work, benches, pedestrian walkways, bicycle parking, recreation facilities and outdoor eating areas. Useable open space that is landscaped (such as a landscaped side or rear yard and not balconies, roofs or other non-landscaped areas), parking lot landscaping and perimeter landscaping count towards the total landscaped area.

## USEABLE OPEN SPACE AREAS

Useable open space is defined as an outdoor or unenclosed area on the ground, or on a roof, balcony, porch, pool area or recreation building, which is accessible for outdoor recreation, landscaping or pedestrian access. For an area to be considered useable open space, it must have the following characteristics:

- **Location** - In R-2 zoning district, useable open space may not be located in any required front yard area. In R-3, R-4, or R-5 zoning districts, up to 50% of the required front yard may be counted towards the useable open space.
- **Dimensions** - Side and rear yards must be 12 ft. in any direction and 200 sq. ft. minimum area. Roofs, decks or porches must be 10 ft. in any direction and 120 sq. ft. minimum total area. Private balconies must be 7 ft. in any direction and 80 sq. ft. minimum total area.

## MINIMUM LANDSCAPED AREAS AND USEABLE OPEN SPACE

*Areas per unit listed below are the minimum average required for the whole development.*

Zoning District	Landscaped Area	Useable Open Space
R-0, R-1, R-1.5 R-1.7/PD	50% of required front yard (see sidebar)	Not applicable
R-2	850 sq. ft./unit	500 sq. ft./unit (see sidebar)
R-3	425 sq. ft./ unit	400 sq. ft./unit
R-4, R-5	375 sq. ft./ unit	380 sq. ft./unit* (*see sidebar)
C-1, C-2 C-3, C-4	20% of lot or 12.5% of floor area (whichever is more)	Not applicable
DSP	See SMC 19.28	See SMC 19.28
O, P-F	20% of lot area	Not applicable
M-S, M-3	20% of lot /10% of floor area (whichever is more)	Not applicable

### **WATER-EFFICIENT LANDSCAPING AND IRRIGATION**

*Landscaping projects that include 500 sq. ft. or more of landscaped area may be subject to additional water-efficient landscaping and irrigation requirements. Refer to p. 2 of this handout for more information.*

### **MAXIMUM PAVED SURFACES**

*Single-family dwellings are limited to 50% paved surface in the required front yard (including the driveway).*

### **SINGLE-FAMILY/ DUPLEX LANDSCAPE REHABILITATION**

*A permit is not required for re-landscaping an existing yard on a single-family or duplex property as long as a landscaping plan was not previously required for the property.*

**REQUIRED USEABLE OPEN SPACE FOR R-2 and DSP BLOCKS 8-12**  
*Lots with an accessory living unit must have a total of 1,000 sq. ft. of useable open space.*

### **\*PRIVATE OPEN SPACE FOR R-4 AND R-5 ZONING DISTRICTS**

*80 sq. ft. per unit must be designated as private useable open space (deck, patio, etc.)*

## PARKING LOT LANDSCAPING

- At least 20% of parking area must be landscaped in all multi-family residential, commercial and industrial zoning districts.
- Trees shall be planted and maintained throughout the parking lot to ensure that at least 50% of the parking area will be shaded within 15 years after planting. A portion of the parking lot shading requirement may be met with installation of solar energy systems rather than trees. (Refer to the *Parking Lot Shading* and *Master Parking Lot Tree List* handouts for details.)
- Landscaped islands with trees typically need to be at least 5 ft. x 5 ft. excluding curbs (curbs to include “weep holes” to allow drainage).
- Islands shall contain living ground cover or shrubs with the trees, unless it can be shown that ground cover is incompatible with the tree.

## PERIMETER LANDSCAPING

- A 15-ft. wide landscaped strip is required along the entire frontage of a lot, measured from the inside edge of the public sidewalk. If no sidewalk exists, the strip is measured from the curb. Frontage strip landscaping may be crossed by walkways and access drives.
- Frontage landscaping is not required for single-family residential uses with frontage on a public street.
- Buffer landscaping is required for any non-residential use that abuts a residential use or residential zoning district. The buffer shall be at least 10 ft. wide and include a minimum 6-ft. tall masonry wall. Trees and shrubs shall be planted at 20-ft. intervals.

## ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

There are specific guidelines in policy documents (e.g. Precise Plan for El Camino Real, developments adjacent to streams, etc.) that may place additional criteria on landscaping design. Please consult the Planner on duty for additional information about these requirements.

## TREE SURVEYS AND PROTECTION PLANS

Tree surveys may be required for development projects. The tree survey must be conducted by an arborist who is certified by the International Society of Arboriculture. See sidebar for more information.

The City requires a Tree Protection Plan to safeguard the health of protected trees during construction. Protection plans must include a 4-ft. high fence installed along the dripline of each protected tree. Existing grade level around the tree shall be maintained. Pruning, if necessary, shall be reviewed and approved by the City Arborist. Tree bonds and soil mitigation may also be required.

## WATER-EFFICIENT LANDSCAPING AND IRRIGATION

Pursuant to State law, the City adopted water-efficient landscaping and irrigation regulations. These regulations are anticipated to stretch our limited water supplies, reduce water waste in irrigation, and increase drought resistance.

In addition to minimum required landscaped areas and useable open space, the following projects are subject to water-efficiency design, planting and irrigation requirements:

- **Single-family/duplex projects:** NEW landscaping installations 500 sq. ft. or more in conjunction with NEW construction of a dwelling unit on an existing lot.
- **All other projects:** NEW landscaping installations 500 sq. ft. or more or REHABILITATED landscaping projects 1,000 sq. ft. or more.

### **STORMWATER MEASURES**

*New development or redevelopment may be required to manage stormwater runoff, as required in Chapter 12.60 of the Sunnyvale Municipal Code. It is important to coordinate your landscaping plan and stormwater management plan. Refer to the Stormwater handout regarding these requirements.*

### **TREE SURVEY REQUIREMENTS**

- *Location, size and species of all trees on the site*
- *Calculation of the value of each tree*
- *A letter explaining why a “protected tree” (38 inches or greater in circumference, measured at 4.5 ft. above ground level) is proposed for removal and cannot be relocated.*

### **RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS**

*A green building checklist is required for all new residential dwellings (see Green Building Program handout). The water-efficient landscaping and irrigation regulations achieve many of the landscaping points on the Build it Green checklists.*

Landscaping and irrigation plans are required to be prepared by a certified professional (see sidebar), unless the project includes less than 2,500 sq. ft. of landscaped area. See p. 4 of this handout and consult with the Planner on duty for more information about permit and submittal requirements.

## WATER EFFICIENCY DESIGN

Landscaping design and plant selection may be based on one of two options:

- **Option 1:** NO turf/lawn or high water use plants and at least 80% of plants installed are native, low water or no water use plants. Refer to the *Landscaping Resources* handout.
- **Option 2:** If the turf limitation is not selected, landscaping design must be based on Water Budget Calculations. Refer to the *Landscaping Water Budget Calculations* handout.

## PLANTING, SOIL MANAGEMENT AND WATER FEATURES

- Plant selection and installation must be done in accordance with accepted horticultural industry practices. See *Landscaping Resources* handout. Projects may be required to plant a minimum number and size of trees, shrubs, etc.
- Plants with similar water needs must be grouped in the same area (“hydrozone”). Areas with a mix of plants with different water needs may be allowed if Option 2 (described above) is selected.
- Tall fescue or similar turf requiring less water must be used for any allowable turf areas. Turf must not be planted on slopes greater than 10%.
- A minimum 3-in. layer of mulch must be applied on all exposed soil.
- Soil amendments and structured soil must be incorporated based on what is appropriate for selected plants. Compost must be incorporated at a minimum rate of 4 cubic yards per 1,000 sq. ft. to a depth of 6 inches.
- Water features (i.e. fountains) must have a recirculating water system and use recycled water if available.
- Covers are required for new pool and spa installations.

## IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

All required landscaped areas must be provided with a permanent irrigation system for all uses, except for single-family detached and duplex dwellings. Irrigation systems must be designed and maintained to prevent water waste (e.g. runoff or overspray). Irrigation controllers must be capable of multiple programming and incorporate sensors to override the call for water during rain or if the soil is still moist. Irrigation controllers and backflow devices must be screened from public view. Irrigation can only occur between 8 p.m. and 10 a.m., or as may be restricted by City resolution (visit [the City’s Drought and Water Conservation page](#)).

## IRRIGATION AUDIT AND SCHEDULES

After landscaping and irrigation has been installed (and prior to final inspection for a building permit), a Landscaping Maintenance Schedule and Certificate of Completion must be submitted. For new landscaping installations 500 sq. ft. or more and rehabilitated landscapes 2,500 sq. ft. or more, an Irrigation Audit Report and Irrigation Schedule must be prepared and submitted by a third party certified professional.

**CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL**  
*means a licensed landscape architect, licensed landscape contractor, licensed engineer, certified irrigation designer or any other person authorized by the State to design a landscape or irrigation system.*

### IRRIGATION AUDIT AND REPORT

*When required, the irrigation audit must be conducted and a report must be prepared by a third party certified professional. The report must include inspection, system tune-up, system test with distribution uniformity, correction of any overspray or runoff and preparation of an irrigation schedule.*

### LANDSCAPING MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

*A schedule includes routine inspection, adjustment and repair of irrigation system, replenishing mulch, fertilizing, pruning and weeding in all landscaped areas and other measures to maintain healthy landscapes.*

*See SMC 19.37 and Water-Efficient Landscaping Checklist for more details on the water-efficient landscaping requirements.*

## PERMIT PROCESS

### PLANNING DIVISION REVIEW

1. Submit the appropriate permit application and plans for Planning review. Single-family detached and duplex landscaping projects are reviewed as part of the Design Review (DR) process for the proposed new home. For all other projects, a Miscellaneous Plan Permit (MPP) is typically required. If the landscaping project is part of a larger development, landscaping and irrigation plans may be reviewed under the required permits and processes for the entire project (Use Permit, Rezone, Tentative Map, etc.). Consult with the Planner on duty regarding the appropriate review process.
2. The City reviews the application and makes a decision. Review time depends on the permit type and scope of a project. DRs and MPPs usually take two weeks to review.

### PLANNING REVIEW APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

(2 copies of each item unless noted otherwise)

- Application signed by the property owner. (1 copy)
- Consult with the Planner on duty for specific submittal requirements. At a minimum, the following are required:
  - Landscaping and Irrigation Plans indicating which water-efficiency design option is selected and showing proposed plantings, protected trees, trees proposed to be removed, and each hydrozone area labeled with water use, irrigation type and size.
  - Water-Efficient Landscaping Checklist
  - Water Budget Calculation Worksheets (if applicable)
- Fee (non refundable) \_\_\_\_\_

### BUILDING PERMIT REVIEW

1. Once your Planning Permit has been approved, submit for a building permit.
2. Landscaping-only projects that require a plumbing permit for installation of an irrigation system are reviewed by the Building division between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon, Monday through Friday.  
  
Other projects may require a 21-day plan review. Please consult with the Building Division staff for specific requirements.
3. After a Building Permit is issued, field inspections are completed to ensure compliance with all applicable codes. After installation and prior to scheduling a final inspection, make sure the following items have been completed or ready to submit to the building inspector:
  - Certificate of Completion
  - Landscaping Maintenance Schedule
  - Irrigation Schedule
  - Irrigation Audit and Report (if applicable)

### BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

(3 or 5 copies of each item, depending on the review process)

- Required plans and documents are based on the location, configuration, and scope of the project. Please consult with the Building Division staff for specific requirements.
- Fee \_\_\_\_\_