

## River Friendly Landscape Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### All Rebates:

- 1. Does the City help with any other part of the renovation?** No, the City Water Conservation Specialists will only provide input for water efficiencies during a Water Wise House Call (scheduled through 3-1-1), but cannot help with any part of the renovation process.
- 2. Can the City provide the names of contractors who are familiar with this program?** The City of Sacramento does not endorse or support any specific contractor. However, the website [www.bewatersmart.info](http://www.bewatersmart.info) has a link to help you find contractors in your area.
- 3. I am using a contractor, are there special receipt requirements?** Yes. Please visit [SpareSacWater.org/RiverFriendly](http://SpareSacWater.org/RiverFriendly)\* to download our Contractor Information Packet that you can pass on to your contractor outlining the River Friendly Landscape Program's receipt requirements.
- 4. What if I sell my property and the new owners replace rebated turf conversion, irrigation, or rain barrels before the five year minimum ends?** Should the property transfer to a new owner and said new owner changes rebated landscapes, irrigation systems, or rain barrels the City will not hold the previous owner responsible. The previous owner shall not be required to repay the City the funds they received from the River Friendly Landscape Program.

### Turf Conversion Rebate:

- 5. What plants can I use in my water-efficient landscape?** The Program does not require particular plants, only that when fully mature, the plants cover at least fifty percent (50%) of the converted area (non-contiguous areas will be considered separately), and that the plants not be high water use or invasive species. An applicant can use any low and/or medium water use plants to meet this requirement; however, the City highly encourages the use of drought tolerant and native species, and many of these plants can be found on the River Friendly Landscape Program Plant List which is located on [SpareSacWater.org/RiverFriendly](http://SpareSacWater.org/RiverFriendly)\*. An Applicant should also consider keeping any existing trees because they provide shade to one's home and landscape.
- 6. Can I receive credit for replacing my lawn with artificial turf?** Not at this time. The City Planning Division will be looking at options for people to use artificial turf on a more permanent basis in their front yards as part of the package of Planning and Development Code amendments that will be brought forward to the City Council sometime in the future. The City Water Conservation Office relayed that during a time of water shortage declared by the City Council, groundcover does not have to be living. However, when the declaration is rescinded, a resident would have to abide by any regulations in effect in the City Code.
- 7. Do I have to remove all of my grass in my front yard to qualify?** Yes, all turf grass in your front and qualifying side yard area(s) must be removed and retrofitted.
- 8. Can I receive credit for putting in a patio, a walkway or an extension to my driveway?** If you will be removing turf to install a patio, or walkway, the City will allow this area to count

toward the converted area if a permeable product is used. Permeable products include pervious pavement, gravel, or brick or flagstone with permeable, mortarless materials for grout lines (such as sand and gravel). All of these options reduce water runoff by allowing water to pass through the surface and be absorbed into the soil beneath. Keep in mind that the conversion area must still meet the fifty percent (50%) living plant coverage requirement and you will not be reimbursed for the materials used to install a patio, flagstones, walkway or extension to your driveway.

- 9. I turned off the water on my grass and it has started to die. Can I still qualify for the program?** Turf allowed to die in response to drought conditions is eligible for this rebate, but must be left intact until project approval. If you have taken your grass out, you will not be eligible for funding.
- 10. Can I receive credit for replacing my high water use grass with a low water use grass?** No. This program provides incentive to convert grass to alternative types of landscaping, including trees, shrubs and groundcovers. These use less water than even the lowest water use grass.
- 11. What if my Homeowner's Association or CC&Rs require me to keep grass in my yard?** To avoid problems, an applicant must make certain to follow all applicable laws, rules, and appropriate HOA and CC&R policies that may apply to any anticipated landscaping project. Be sure to consult with your HOA first before turning in your completed application.
- 12. What is mulch and why is it required?** The most common types of mulch are decorative rock or bark. A two to three inch layer of mulch is required. Mulch helps maintain the moisture level, and wood mulches help retain the temperature of and add nutrients to the soil. Without mulch, wind and heat pull the moisture out of the soil and therefore more water is needed to keep plants healthy. Also, without mulch the temperature of the soil constantly fluctuates causing plants a lot of stress. Additional benefits include the reduction of weed growth, erosion, and certain insect diseases.
- 13. Do I get credit for removing my high water use plants other than grass?** No. The City's River Friendly Landscape Program focuses solely on the removal of turf grass. However, most shrub beds may be watered more effectively by converting the irrigation system to a drip irrigation system and installing a WaterSense labeled Smart Irrigation Controller.
- 14. I have many plants surrounding the grass that I'm removing; will these plants count toward the 50 percent coverage requirement?** No, they do not count toward the 50 percent coverage requirement because they are not in the turf-removal area. If you have plants within the rebate area, those will count towards your 50 percent plant coverage (you will receive credit for 25% of an existing tree canopy if they are a low or medium water use plant).
- 15. Why does the City require plants?** This program encourages the use of water efficient landscaping because there are many benefits to including plants in your landscape plans. Trees, shrubs and groundcovers provide shade, absorb carbon dioxide, supply oxygen, reduce soil erosion, give wildlife a home, decrease energy use, reduce storm water runoff, and save water.

- 16. Do plants have to cover 50 percent of the conversion area when you inspect my landscape?** No. The new plants that you put into your landscape will not be mature by the time your project is inspected. The calculations you submitted for the mature plant size will be considered to reach the 50 percent requirement, not the size of the plants when we inspect.
- 17. I don't like the desert look; what are my options?** With proper design and plant selection, an applicant can accomplish almost any look or feel and still save water. Visit [rwa.watersavingplant.com](http://rwa.watersavingplant.com) for design ideas and photos of water efficient landscapes.
- 18. Do I have to use a weed barrier?** No. Weed barriers are generally recommended in areas that have a particular weed problem (i.e. areas where Bermuda grass is being removed or under permeable surfaces such as patios and walkways where plants will not be grown). If a weed barrier is used, the City requires that it be permeable allowing both water and air to penetrate.
- 19. What is the average savings on a "Cash for Grass" conversion?** A local study shows that each square foot of turf removed (and replaced with water efficient landscaping) saves 37 gallons per year per square foot. This equates to a 17 percent overall reduction in use. For established landscapes, savings improve resulting in savings of 46 gallons per year per square foot removed and a 21 percent overall reduction in water use.
- 20. Where can I find the River Friendly Landscape Plant List?** Please visit [SpareSacWater.org/RiverFriendly\\*](http://SpareSacWater.org/RiverFriendly*) to download the Plant List.
- 21. What if I want to change my plants after I have been approved?** Please email any changes, along with your name and address to: [riverfriendly@cityofsacramento.org](mailto:riverfriendly@cityofsacramento.org) for approval.
- 22. How do I measure my landscape area?** Please see [SpareSacWater.org/RiverFriendly\\*](http://SpareSacWater.org/RiverFriendly*) for a full description on how to measure your landscape area.
- 23. If I do not have an existing irrigation system in my front yard, am I required to install one in order to participate in the program?** No. However, you must irrigate your new landscape according to the City's Water Conservation Ordinance and without allowing water to runoff your property. Under the current drought restrictions, a new, River Friendly landscape that was hand irrigated could only be watered twice a week, whereas a RFL irrigated with drip and microspray irrigation could water more frequently.

### **Irrigation Upgrade Rebate:**

- 24. What is a WaterSense labeled Smart Irrigation Controller?** The EPA's WaterSense program website states "WaterSense labeled irrigation controllers, which act like a thermostat for your sprinkler system telling it when to turn on and off, use local weather and landscape conditions to tailor watering schedules to actual conditions on the site. Instead of irrigating using a controller with a clock and a preset schedule, WaterSense labeled controllers allow watering schedules to better match plants' water needs. With proper installation, programming, and maintenance, homeowners and businesses can use WaterSense labeled controllers instead of standard clock-timer controllers on their existing systems, and no longer worry about wasted water."

- 25. Do I have to upgrade my irrigation system in order to get the rebate for the EPA WaterSense Labeled Smart Irrigation Controller?** No, you can apply for a rebate for an EPA WaterSense Labeled Smart Irrigation Controller separate from the rebate for upgrading your irrigation system.
- 26. Why do I need a filter and pressure regulator?** The emitters on a drip irrigation system have very small openings for the water to pass through. A filter prevents sediment from clogging emitters, ensuring that plants will get the correct amount of water. A pressure regulator keeps the irrigation system at the manufacturer's recommended pressure (usually between 20 and 40 pounds per square inch). Not installing a pressure regulator may cause fittings and lines to fail, creating wasteful breaks and leaks in your system.

### **Rain Barrel Rebate:**

- 27. What are rain barrels?** Rain barrels are used to collect rainwater from rooftops and store it for later use. They are generally low cost systems that supplement your water supply and by installing rain barrels, you are helping to maintain a healthy urban watershed by reducing the demand on the potable water system to irrigate your garden.
- 28. Why do I have to have a cover on my rain barrels?** Rain barrels must be securely covered in order to keep mosquitos, rodents, and debris from entering your stored water. Securely covering your rain barrels can also prevent children and animals from entering the rain barrels or even falling in.
- 29. Is stored water safe to drink?** No, the water stored in rain barrels is not safe to drink. This is not potable (suitable for drinking) water because it has not been treated to prevent bacteria growth. This water is only suitable to be used to water landscapes.
- 30. How do I prevent mosquitos?** Mosquitos are attracted to standing water, but if done correctly, you can take steps to prevent mosquitos being attracted to your rain barrels. Most importantly you will need to cover your rain barrel, and ensure that there are no leaks where mosquitos can enter. You can also prevent mosquitos by placing your rain barrels on a permeable surface so that overflow soaks into the ground rather than pooling on paved surfaces, keep your rain barrels free of organic material, and splash any standing water off of the top of your rain barrels after a rain.
- 31. Why do I need to connect my rain barrel to a gutter downspout?** You must connect your rain barrel to a gutter downspout in order to direct the flow of rain water into the barrel.
- 32. Are rain barrels a good option for me?** Rain barrels and cisterns are appropriate for installation on sites that have roof areas that drain to downspouts, a firm surface to support a rain barrel (to prevent shifting and falling over), a place where captured water can be used located within a reasonable distance, and a landscaped area or safe path to the storm drain.

\*If you need a hard copy of any documents, please contact the River Friendly Landscape Program at (916) 808-1337.