

- 1. What plants can I use in my water-efficient landscape?** The River Friendly Landscape Rebate Program does not require specific plants, only that when fully mature, the plants cover at least 60% 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 ([www.sacwaterwise.com/Rebates/River-Friendly-Landscape-Rebate](http://www.sacwaterwise.com/Rebates/River-Friendly-Landscape-Rebate)). An Applicant should also consider keeping any existing trees because they provide shade for home and landscape, and they could count toward canopy coverage.

The City maintains a list of the most commonly used low and/or medium water use plants in the Sacramento Valley region. This list provides both the plant's common name and its botanical name. The list includes the mature size of each plant in square feet to help ensure that applicant's meet the 60% coverage requirement. If an applicant chooses plants that are not included on the City's list of approved plants, the applicant must provide the City with the water use and coverage requirements of the chosen plants, along with a valid source where the information can be verified by Water Conservation Staff prior to beginning the conversion project. Once again, high water use plants and trees, and invasive species do not meet the program terms and conditions and are excluded from the program.

- 2. Can I receive credit for replacing my lawn with artificial turf?** No. Although replacing your living turf with artificial turf is completely legal, it is not accepted for our current River Friendly Landscape conversion rebate. For details on the City's landscape requirements addressing artificial turfgrass, visit: [http://www.qcode.us/codes/sacramento/view.php?frames=on&topic=17-vi-17\\_612-17\\_612\\_010#0](http://www.qcode.us/codes/sacramento/view.php?frames=on&topic=17-vi-17_612-17_612_010#0)
- 3. Do I have to remove all my grass lawn in my front yard to qualify?** No. You can keep some turf areas, however, a barrier is needed between the remaining turf and the former lawn. Apply for our Irrigation Upgrade rebate to most efficiently irrigate the remaining grass lawns.
- 4. Can I receive credit for putting in a patio or a walkway?** If the applicant 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, but you will not be reimbursed for this expense. Permeable products include pervious pavement, gravel, or brick or flagstone with permeable, mortar-less materials for grout lines (such as sand and gravel). All of these options reduce the amount of 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 60% living plant coverage requirement and you will not be reimbursed for installing a patio, flagstones or a walkway.

- 6. Can I receive credit for extending my driveway?** If you choose to expand your driveway into an area that was formerly a grass lawn, we would simply subtract that area from your total convertible area.
- 7. I turned off the water on my grass and it has started to die. Can I still qualify for the program?** Turf must be currently maintained and verified during the pre-inspection site visit. If the turf is present but dying, the rebate will be \$1.50 per square foot replaced. If the ground is bare (dirt) the rebate will be \$.50 per square foot replaced.
- 8. Can I receive credit for replacing my high water use grass with a low water use grass?** No. This program provides an 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. However, the City does encourage homeowners to use low water use grass in those areas where grass is needed or desired outside of this program. In those areas, upgrade the irrigation efficiency of your lawn sprinklers and receive a rebate through our Irrigation Upgrade program.
- 9. If I have children and/or a dog, how do I incorporate River Friendly landscaping into my yard?** You can now maintain a portion of your lawn for pets or children and still have a nice low-water-use landscape. There are many landscape designs found at <http://rwa.watersavingplants.com/gallery.php>
- 10. What if my Homeowner's Association or CC&Rs requires me to keep grass in my yard?** To avoid problems, an applicant must make certain to follow all applicable laws, rules, appropriate HOA and CC&R policies that may apply to any anticipated landscaping project. However, HOAs should not object to any well maintained water wise landscape. To be sure, an applicant should consult with their HOA first before turning in their completed application.
- 11. What is mulch and why is it required?** The most common types of mulch are decorative rock or bark. Mulch helps maintain the moisture level, and wood mulches add organic materials to the soil. Without mulch, wind and heat pull the moisture out of the soil and more water is then 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. A two to three inch layer of mulch is required. Mulch pieces must be 6" or smaller.
- 12. 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 there is an incentive for irrigation upgrades within the River Friendly program.

- 13. I have many plants surrounding the grass that I'm removing. Will these plants count toward the 60% coverage requirement?** Generally speaking, they do not count toward the 60% coverage requirement because you are not adding more plants. A portion of the existing tree's canopy (up to 25%) can count toward the 60% coverage requirement if the tree is planted in the lawn area about to be converted to a River Friendly Landscape.
- 14. Why does the City require plants?** This program encourages the use of water efficient landscaping, and the City wants that landscaping to be attractive in order to encourage others to do the same. 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.
- 15. Do plants have to cover 60% of the conversion area when you come and inspect my landscape?** An applicant can choose to use plants at any size/maturity. Planting smaller/younger plants (1 gallon) is less expensive and they have a tendency to adapt better to their new environment. The City uses the full mature value of the plant type to determine plant coverage.
- 16. I don't like the desert look. What are my options?** Water efficient landscaping can be much more than rocks and cactus. There are hundreds of plants that use very little, if any, water. With proper design and plant selection, an applicant can accomplish almost any look or feel and still save water. Go to <http://rwa.watersavingplants.com/gallery.php> for design ideas and photos of water efficient landscapes in our area.
- 17. 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.
- 18. Why do I need a filter and pressure regulator for my drip system?** 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.

**19. How do you define an efficient irrigation system?** The installation of an efficient irrigation system begins with good design. A low volume drip system is a proper choice for trees, plants and shrubs applying water directly to the plants roots. For turf areas, systems must apply water uniformly over the desired area with a minimum of overspray into adjacent areas. There are sprinkler heads on the market today that offer low precipitation rates (such as rotating spray heads) that save water and allow the soil to absorb the applied water minimizing any runoff.

The City recommends installing a Water Sense labeled smart irrigation timer that (after proper programming) automatically adjusts itself to provide the right amount of water to your landscape. Smart Controllers are required for turf grass conversion projects, unless the customer will hand-water the landscape.

**20. Are vegetable gardens allowed?** Vegetable gardens are excluded from the River Friendly Landscape Program. However, customers who wish to create a vegetable garden may be eligible for funding through the City's Irrigation upgrade rebate, which is part of the River Friendly Program. Visit our website for details on this forthcoming program.

**21. What is the average savings on a "Cash for Grass" conversion?** A preliminary savings study was conducted on "Cash for Grass" participants in the City of Roseville. Initial results found that each square foot of turf removed (and replaced with water efficient landscaping) saved 37 gallons per year per square foot. This equates to a 17% overall reduction in use. For established landscapes, savings improve resulting in savings of 46 gallons per year per square foot removed and a 21% overall reduction in water use.

**22. What is a "Smart" irrigation controller?** A "smart" or weather based irrigation controller uses local weather data (temperature and rainfall) and landscape conditions tailor watering schedules to actual conditions on the site. Conventional controllers irrigate using a controller with a clock and a preset schedule, WaterSense labeled controllers allow watering schedules to better match plants' water needs. To see a list of qualified WaterSense labeled smart irrigation controllers, visit:  
[http://www.epa.gov/watersense/product\\_search.html?Category=5](http://www.epa.gov/watersense/product_search.html?Category=5)

**23. Are Water Sense labeled smart controllers required for all new River Friendly front yard conversion projects?** No, it is not a requirement if you plan to irrigate your new landscape by hand and have no existing irrigation system.

**24. If I do not have 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 regularly during the establishment period without allowing water to runoff your property. The new River Friendly Landscape must be maintained for at least five years.

- 25. How do I get approval to get started?** Read and fill out the Customer Agreement. Research landscape designs and submit a list of plants on the plant coverage worksheet along with a sketch of your design. Include as much detail as possible, showing walkways, plant location, and the amount of space taken up by the plant at maturity. Do not proceed with your project until you get approval from the River Friendly Landscape staff.
- 26. Does the city help with plant selection, turf removal, or any other part of the renovation?** Currently, the city does not help with the plant selection, turf removal, or any other part of the renovation process.
- 27. Do I have to mail the application in?** No, you can hand deliver it, email it or submit it online.
- 28. What do I have to do to ask for an extension or deferment?** After your pre-inspection is approved, River Friendly Landscape staff will contact you with start and completion dates.
- 29. 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)
- 30. Can the City provide the names of contractors who are familiar with this type of landscape?** 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.
- 31. Is there anyone who can help me learn about the Landscape Renovation process?** Visit [www.sacwaterwise.com/Calendar](http://www.sacwaterwise.com/Calendar) to see if there are classes offered.
- 32. I am using a contractor, are there special receipt requirements?** Yes there are; please contact River Friendly Landscape Staff and we will send you a packet of information for you to pass on to your contractor outlining the River Friendly Landscape Program's receipt requirements.