



## **South Tahoe Public Utility District Turf Buy-Back Program 2009 Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***Artificial Turf***

#### **Can I receive credit for replacing my lawn with artificial turf?**

No. Permeable turf does exist, however TRPA does not allow it in the Basin. (The only exception being LTCC ball field as a demonstration project.)

### ***Concrete patios, curbing, walkways, and driveways***

#### **Do I get credit for putting in a concrete patio, curbing, walkways, or an extension to my driveway?**

In addition to TRPA prohibitions, there is no credit for the above additions. You can incorporate them into your landscaping, but non-permeable areas will not be included when determining your rebate.

However, if the patio or walkway is brick or flagstone with sand grouting (not concrete) allowing air and water to pass through, they **may** be included in your conversion area, assuming all other program requirements are met. Gravel pathways are also acceptable as long as they are permeable. It is the applicant's responsibility to verify they will not violate TRPA coverage requirements.

### ***Conversion Costs***

#### **How much does a conversion typically cost?**

Other agency data reflects program participants spend about \$2.00 per square foot for their landscaping. Elaborate landscapes with retaining walls, landscape lighting, and other amenities may cost \$5.00 per square foot or more. When considering the overall financial impact of your new landscape, don't forget to consider the reduction of your maintenance costs (and the time spent mowing and fertilizing). Water use studies show the average household water and maintenance costs of similar program participants decreased by more than one-third.

### ***Financing your landscape***

Many banks offer home improvement loans that can be used for landscaping. Since the District issues your rebate check within 60 days of completed project inspection, you can apply it against the principal of the loan at that time.

## ***Grass***

### **I stopped watering my grass already and it has started to turn brown. Can I still apply for the program?**

Since the purpose of this program is to reduce water demand, you must be currently maintaining a grass lawn. Once the District visits your property to see if it fits the program qualifications, you may stop watering your lawn. However, don't remove any of the grass until after the District completes the pre-conversion site visit, or your conversion will be ineligible. A District staff member must validate the turf areas before you start your project.

### **Can I receive credit for replacing my high water-use grass with low water-use grass?**

No. This program provides an incentive to convert grass to alternative types of landscaping, including trees, shrubs, and ground covers. These use less water than even the lowest water-use grass. However, the District does encourage homeowners to use low water-use grass in areas where grass is needed or desired.

### **If I have kids and a dog, how do I incorporate water smart landscaping in my yard?**

One of the principles of water smart landscaping is functional lawn areas. You don't have to eliminate your entire lawn to participate. Some conversion projects involve creating a buffer area around the edge of an existing lawn. To determine where you have nonfunctional turf, ask yourself "Is the only time I walk on the lawn when I am mowing it?" If so, consult a landscaping professional to suggest alternatives.

## ***Homeowner's Associations***

### **What if my HOA requires me to keep grass in my yard?**

Most government jurisdictions in the Tahoe area have laws that prevent a homeowner's association (HOA) from restricting the installation of water-saving landscape. In some cases, your HOA board may not be aware of the potential conflict between their covenants and the law. In any case, your HOA is still likely to have some say in the design of your landscape. To avoid problems, be sure you follow all appropriate HOA policies that may apply to your new landscaping project.

## ***Mulch***

### **What is mulch, and why do you require it?**

The most common types of mulch are rocks, bark, or wood chips. Mulch helps maintain the moisture level and the temperature of the soil. Without mulch, wind and heat would pull the moisture out of the soil and additional water would be needed to keep your plants healthy. Also, the temperature of the soil would constantly fluctuate, causing significant stress to your plants. Some other benefits include reduction of weed growth, soil erosion, and certain insect diseases.

## ***Plants***

### **What plants can I use in my water smart landscape?**

The District's Buy-Back program does not require specific plants, but highly recommends low moisture requiring, drought tolerant, native or adaptive plants be incorporated into your new landscape. The District also suggests use of plants that, when fully mature, cover at least 50 percent of the converted area.

Local landscapers and nurseries can suggest plants that will meet these needs.

### **Do I get credit for removing high water-use plants?**

No. Our program is focused only on the removal of grass. However, you can water most shrub beds more effectively by converting the irrigation system to drip irrigation.

### **I have many plants surrounding the grass that I am removing. Will these plants count towards the 50 percent coverage requirement?**

No. The District only counts the plants that are currently planted in the grass area or those that are added to the area where the grass is removed, such that the trunk or stem of the plant is in the converted area.

### **Why do you require plants?**

This program encourages the use of water efficient landscaping, and the District wants that landscape 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, lessen noise pollution, lowers air temperatures, reduces storm water run-off and a host of other benefits.

## **Do plants have to cover 50 percent of the conversion area when you come and inspect my house?**

You can choose plants any size you like. The District will utilize the “full mature” values to determine plant coverage.

### ***Professional Contractors***

#### **Can I do this myself?**

Many individuals have the skills and experience to complete conversions on their own. However, licensed landscape professionals are irrigation experts and can generally accomplish the project faster and can suggest integrated comprehensive landscaping plans.

### ***Weed Barriers***

#### **Do I have to use a weed barrier?**

No. Weed barriers are generally recommended in areas that have particular weed problems. If a weed barrier is used, it must be permeable, such as fabric or mesh.

#### **Why can't I use an impermeable weed barrier like plastic?**

An Impermeable weed barrier causes precipitation to run off and contribute to soil erosion. Not allowing water and air to pass through can cause serious damage to the plants in the immediate and surrounding area. Also, summer heat and sunlight exposure can cause plastic to become brittle and break apart.

### ***Filter and Pressure Regulator***

#### **Why do I need a filter and pressure regulator?**

The emitters of drip irrigation systems have very small openings for the water to pass through. The filter prevents sediment from clogging the emitters, ensuring 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). Failure to install a pressure regulator may cause fittings to break and lines to fail creating leaks in your system.