Landscape Design Guide

FOR DEVELOPERS, ARCHITECTS, PLANNERS, & DESIGNERS



Scan for Resources

A PROGRAM OF

EAGLE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Beyond Lawn

- Waterwise Landscaping
- Biodiversity Enhancement
- Irrigation Efficiency
- Policy Guidance
- Firewise Landscaping
- Community Education

EAGLE RIVER VALLEY'S RESOURCE FOR SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT LANDSCAPING

Beyond Lawn is an Eagle County Conservation District program that helps homeowners and HOAs replace thirsty landscaping with waterwise, biodiverse, fire-smart alternatives. Through low-cost property evaluations, expert guidance, robust online resources, and financial support for upgrades, Beyond Lawn makes it easier to cut water use, lower maintenance, and build a landscape that actually fits our mountain climate — without giving up a yard you love.

SERVICES



Low Cost Landscape & Irrigation Evaluations



Financial Incentives for Upgrades



Resources & Educational Opportunities

OBJECTIVES



Establishing a Network of Qualified Landscape Professionals



Guiding resilient landscaping policy



Broadening community outreach

Scan or visit beyondlawn.org/professionals for the Sustainable Landscaping Guide, Landscaping Management Guide, and Landscape Design Guide.

beyondlawn.org **(970) 236-1165**

beyondlawn@eccdistrict.org

For information on other ECCD programs, visit eccdistrict.org

A PROGRAM OF THE EAGLE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Start Here

Landscapes in the valley are moving away from traditional lawns. This guide covers the codes for new and redeveloped landscapes, what makes designing here distinct, and how to turn change into opportunity.



Why it matters: design decisions set a property's water use for decades. Turfgrass takes about twice the water of other plant types while providing little ecological benefit, and the layout, palette, and irrigation chosen at design determine what a landscape needs long after hand-off to a property's owner.



In this guide: valley conditions, state law, county code, design ideas, habitat considerations, and firewise landscaping resources. Beyond Lawn is a program of the Eagle County Conservation District. This guide is not legal advice.

Designing for the Valley

What makes the Eagle River Valley distinct

Mountain landscapes come with their own conditions. A short growing season, cool nights, strong winds, intense sun, low humidity, and high altitude. Designs that work with them thrive here.

HARDINESS AND MICROCLIMATE



Specify plants rated one zone colder.

Eagle County ranges from zone 4a to 6a, and most populated areas are 5a or 5b. Altitude, low humidity, harsh sun, and freeze-thaw cycles make conditions harsher than the zone suggests, and slope, aspect and exposure can change conditions within a single site.

FOUNDATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS



Let the surrounding landscape guide the palette.

Montane woodlands, at higher elevations and on north-facing slopes, support lusher, more diverse plantings. Semi-desert shrublands, at lower elevations and on south-facing slopes, call for drought-adapted plants and plants adapted to leaner soils.

SOILS, SLOPES, AND SNOW



Test before specifying amendments.

Soils here tend to be granitic and fast-draining or clay-heavy and slow-draining, and many natives prefer lean soils. Plan for steep slopes, snow storage, plow damage and de-icing salt. Deer and elk browse is part of the brief, so plan accordingly.

WATER AND FIRE



Both shape the site plan.

Most irrigation water is lost to evaporation and runoff rather than returning to the river. Where a property has raw-water rights, county code requires using them. Much of the valley is wildland-urban interface, so the 5 feet around buildings shapes the rest of the design.

State Law for Designers

Colorado law for new and redeveloped landscapes

Several state laws shape what can be installed. Most apply to new construction and redevelopment, not existing landscapes. This page is for information only and is not legal advice.

NONFUNCTIONAL TURF (SB 24-005, HB 25-1113)

Applies to new and redeveloped landscapes.

- No new nonfunctional turf, artificial turf or invasive plants on nonresidential property, HOA common areas, rights-of-way, or multifamily properties with more than 12 units
- Functional turf for play, sports and gathering is still allowed
- Local limits for other residential property are due by January 1, 2028

HOA DESIGN STANDARDS (SB 23-178)

Applies to detached single-family HOAs.

- At least three pre-approved waterwise front-yard designs, and an 80% drought-tolerant option
- Developers drafting new covenants and design guidelines can build these in from the start

OWNER RIGHTS (SB 13-183, HB 24-1091)

Applies to every Colorado HOA.

- HOAs can't ban xeriscape or drought-tolerant landscaping on owner-maintained property, or require turf
- HOAs can't ban fire-hardened building materials, though they can set reasonable standards for fencing

COLORADO WILDFIRE RESILIENCY CODE

Applies in wildland-urban interface areas.

- New construction and major additions need a noncombustible first 5 feet, with no combustible mulch and no new trees
- Some major remodels may also trigger these rules; confirm with the local building department
- County code and towns may add their own rules (see pages 6 and 9)

Eagle County Code

New development in unincorporated Eagle County

Most plans need a Colorado-licensed landscape architect, a water-use estimate by plant grouping, and an irrigation schedule. Single homes of 5,000 sq ft or less are exempt from the architect requirement (Sec. 3.4.1.3). Towns follow their own codes.

TURF (SEC. 3.4.3.2)

New turf is allowed only where it's functional.



- Up to 500 sq ft more per single-family lot (250 per duplex unit); none on slopes over 1:3
- No nonfunctional turf in HOA common areas, multifamily, nonresidential sites or rights-of-way
- Soil test first. New artificial turf is prohibited except on school athletic fields

IRRIGATION AND MULCH (SEC. 3.4.3.5)

Efficient systems, matched to the planting.



- Smart controllers for common areas, sites over five units, and nonresidential sites
- Drip in beds; spray only on turf 10+ feet wide, and none within 5 feet of buildings
- Use raw-water rights; mulch 4 in. of bark or 2–4 in. of stone

PLANT PALETTE (SEC. 3.4.2, APPENDIX B)

Only plants on the county's approved list count.



- The list draws on the Plant Explorer, but they won't match exactly
- High-water plants: no more than half of required trees and shrubs
- Low-water plants on slopes over 25%; no more than 30% from one genus

WARRANTY AND WILDFIRE

Landscapes are expected to establish (Sec. 3.4.7.6).



New landscaping carries a two-year warranty, and dead plants must be replaced within three months. Where landscape and wildfire rules conflict, wildfire rules win. Confirm current requirements with Eagle County Planning.

Moving Beyond Lawn

As turf gives way, designers get to define what comes next. Colorado's own landscape traditions offer a lot to work with, and they give a project a real sense of place.



Coloradoscape, not just xeriscape: keep xeriscape's water-saving intent, but put living plants first, covering most of the ground in native and waterwise vegetation instead of rock. Native grass and wildflower meadows, including blue grama, fill large areas, slopes and transitions with a fraction of turf's water and mowing.





Water and turf, by design: slow it, sink it, spread it. Rain gardens, dry creek beds, permeable paths and planted swales capture runoff, recharge groundwater, and give the eye a place to rest. Functional turf still has a role in play areas, gathering spaces and fields. Placed well, it's efficient to irrigate and far more valuable to the people who use it.

Designing for Nature

Landscapes as habitat

Developed landscapes can do far more than look good. Thoughtful design creates habitat, cools surfaces and builds soil, and people increasingly look for it.





CONNECT THE CORRIDORS

Each project can be a stepping stone.

Continuous vegetation links habitat between open space, riparian areas and neighboring properties. Layers of groundcovers, perennials, shrubs and trees support more species than any single layer.



PLANT FOR POLLINATORS

Design for bloom from snowmelt to October.

Use native and keystone species, which support the most native bees, butterflies and moths. The Plant Explorer filters by bloom time, water need, elevation and more.



DESIGN FOR LOW INPUTS

Simple layouts are easier to maintain well.

Native plants matched to the site need less water, fertilizer and pesticide. Repeating plant masses keep a landscape looking like the plan, and boulders and dead wood add shelter at almost no cost.

Waterwise Is Firewise

Design from the building out

Waterwise plants give an approaching fire less fuel. Most of the valley is wildland-urban interface, so the 5 feet around buildings shapes the site plan.



0–5 FEET: KEEP IT NONCOMBUSTIBLE

This is where embers land and catch.

Design this zone in rock, gravel and pavers with low, non-woody perennials and groundcovers. No wood mulch, shrubs or trees. Vail requires it on new construction and significant additions, and the state code requires it in WUI areas.



5–30 FEET: LOW AND SPACED

Break up fuels so fire can't climb or spread.

Mow grasses near structures to 4 inches or less. Space shrub clumps at least 2½ times their mature height apart, and limb trees up 6 to 10 feet or a third of their height, whichever is less. Remove junipers near the home where possible.



PLAN FOR MAINTENANCE

Design for the care a site will actually get.

Choose plants that stay green with little water, keep areas near buildings easy to clear, and leave room to prune. A landscape that's hard to maintain becomes a fire risk over time.



RESOURCES

Plant lists and legal backing.

Use the Plant Explorer's firewise filter and the Beyond Lawn Fire-Resilient Landscaping Guide. HOAs can't ban fire-hardened fencing, decking or roofing (HB 24-1091), and wildfire rules win where they conflict with landscape rules.

Next Steps

Help yourself, learn with us, or go further

Start wherever it makes sense for you. These resources are open to every professional, whether or not you work with Beyond Lawn.

HELP YOURSELF

Free online guides and tools answer most questions.

The Design, Irrigation, DIY and Maintenance Guides and the Plant Explorer are all at beyondlawn.org. The Resource Directory on the next page lists every link.

LEARN WITH US

Workshops, events and local expertise.

Join a Beyond Lawn workshop or event (beyondlawn.org/workshops-&-events). ECCD also offers affordable soil tests and native seed mixes at eccdistrict.org.

GO FURTHER

Build waterwise into the plan from day one.

Build palettes in the Plant Explorer, and join the professional list at bit.ly/bl-pros-signup. Tell us what would help at bit.ly/bl-pro-survey. Once owners move in, they can request evaluations at bit.ly/beyondlawn-signup and find rebates at beyondlawn.org/rebates.

TALK TO US

We're happy to talk through a project, a plant list or an irrigation question. Working with an HOA? Point the board to bit.ly/bl-hoa-signup. beyondlawn.org · beyondlawn@eccdistrict.org · (970) 236-1165

Beyond Lawn Resources

Everything we offer, in one place

Help yourself, or work with us. Our free online tools answer most landscape questions. When you're ready for a closer look at your property or community, our services can help.

SELF-SERVE RESOURCES

Free guides and tools, available anytime.

- Plant Explorer · beyondlawn.org/plant-explorer
- Design Guide · design.beyondlawn.org
- Fire-Resilient Landscaping Guide (in the Design Guide)
- Irrigation Guide · irrigation.beyondlawn.org
- DIY Guide · diy.beyondlawn.org
- Maintenance Guide · maintenance.beyondlawn.org
- HOA Guides · beyondlawn.org/hoas
- Professional Guides · beyondlawn.org/professionals
- Recursos en Español · beyondlawn.org/recursos-en-español
- Workshops & Events · beyondlawn.org/workshops-&-events
- FAQ · beyondlawn.org/faq

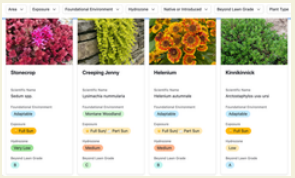
SERVICES

Hands-on help for homeowners and HOAs.

- Landscape & Irrigation Evaluations · beyondlawn.org/evaluations
- Beyond Lawn Rebates · beyondlawn.org/rebates
- HOA Evaluations (16 or fewer common-area zones) · bit.ly/bl-hoa-signup
- HOA Mini-Grants · beyondlawn.org/hoas
- Soil Tests & Native Seed Mixes (ECCD) · eccdistrict.org/seed
- Free Wildfire Assessments (Eagle County REALFire) · bit.ly/bl-realfire

Questions? beyondlawn@eccdistrict.org · (970) 236-1165
Newsletter: bit.ly/beyondlawn-signup · @beyond.lawn
Professional list: bit.ly/bl-pros-signup · Survey: bit.ly/bl-pro-survey

RESOURCES



Plant Explorer



Web-based & Downloadable Guides

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Low Cost Landscape & Irrigation Evaluations



Financial Incentives for Upgrades



Resources & Educational Opportunities

Meet the Team

A PROGRAM OF THE EAGLE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The Eagle County Conservation District is dedicated to preserving and restoring our county's natural resources - soil, water, air, plants, animals, and people - through local projects, partnerships, research, and education. We work with the community to conserve our natural landscapes and to enhance individual conservation efforts, promoting ecological balance in our region for generations to come

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE EAGLE RIVER COALITION

The Eagle River Coalition advocates for the health of the Upper Colorado and Eagle River watersheds through research, education and projects. We strive to protect and enhance the high-quality natural, scenic and economic values that our rivers and tributaries provide to the citizens, visitors and wildlife of the Eagle River and Colorado River watersheds located in Eagle County

COLORADO
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Department of Natural Resources

COLORADO RIVER DISTRICT
PROTECTING WESTERN COLORADO WATER SINCE 1937

EAGLE RIVER WATER & SANITATION DISTRICT

SINGLETREE

EDWARDS COLORADO

AVON COLORADO

Town of Gypsum EST. 1911

EAGLE COUNTY WILDFIRE COLLABORATIVE

Irrigation Analysis
Less Water ... More Green

waternow alliance

ET Irrigation

Beyond Lawn