

St. Vrain Ranch Property Owners Association

Xeriscape / Landscape Standards September 2026

These Xeriscape and Landscaping Standards are intended to help homeowners understand the rules and requirements for updating, installing, or maintaining landscaping on their property. Before starting any landscaping changes or improvements, a Design Review form must be submitted and approved prior to any changes or improvements being made.

- These standards are based on several governing documents and requirements, including the St. Vrain Ranch Design Guidelines (DG), the Master Declaration (MD), the Town of Firestone, Final Development Plan (FDP), applicable State of Colorado House Bills and Senate Bills, and Colorado Revised Statutes & Title 38. All of the following requirements are subject to revision and updates based on changes from the Town or State laws.

Design Review submittal requirements:

- Detailed drawings, dimensions of yard, materials list including location for materials, elevation and colors must be provided to review the project.

1. General Landscaping Rights

- Owners may use xeriscape, drought-tolerant vegetative landscaping, drought-tolerant nonvegetative landscaping, and nonvegetative turf grass as ground cover on property they are responsible for maintaining.
- All live plant material shall be maintained in a healthy and growing condition and must be replaced with live plant material consistent with the approved landscape plan, as applicable if diseased, damaged, destroyed, or removed.
- SB23-178 requires an association to develop at least 3 garden designs that are preapproved by the association for installation in front yards within the common interest community. To receive approval a garden design must adhere to the principles of water-wise landscaping or be part of a water conservation program operated by a local water provider. The Association has not limited garden ideas to just the 3 preapproved plants, rather, members are welcome to research the garden that meets their needs

- St. Vrain Ranch has a list of Xeriscape and Water-wise garden brochures that members may select from a list of designs provided by the Colorado State University's Plant Select website: <https://plantselect.org/tag/colorado-state-university/>. Also see www.stvrainranchpoa.org for additional brochures.

2. Association Design Guidelines 4.5- & 4.6-Yard Requirements

The Association may adopt and enforce reasonable design or aesthetic guidelines for drought-tolerant vegetative landscapes, nonvegetative landscapes, vegetable gardens, plantings, and hardscapes.

Live plant materials shall be selected that are equally suitable for local soil and water conditions and would provide a high level of visual benefits. Plants shall not be invasive, noxious, or prohibited by the American Nursery and Landscape Association.

- Front Yard requires (75%) seventy-five percent live plant material and no more than (20%) twenty percent hardscape.
- Front Yard requires a minimum of (75%) seventy-five percent of the gross front yard area, excluding driveways, landscaped with live plant material.
- Rear/Back & Side Yard requires installed landscaping (50%) fifty percent of the combined (side and rear) yards is to be landscaped with live plant material.
- Up to (80%) eighty percent of the live plant material can be "water-wise plants".
- Irrigation to all landscape areas shall be provided with an adequate and complete-coverage automatic water-efficient irrigation system as listed in Firestone Development Code 16.6.4.E.1.
- Front Yard plant materials require (1) One tree and (3) three 5-gallon size bushes, according to the original landscaping plan approved by the DRC for the property.
- If replacing tree, tree size shall be (1 ½) inch caliper for deciduous trees, (1 ½) inch caliper for ornamental, and (8) feet in height for evergreen trees as listed in Firestone Development Code 16.6.4 F.
- The Association may regulate the type, number, and placement of drought-tolerant plantings and hardscapes that may be installed on a unit owner's property, on a limited common element, or on other property for which the member is responsible.

3. Association Design Guidelines 4.7 and Nonvegetative Turf Grass

All landscaping in the yards shall be maintained by the owner in a condition at least as good as or better than the condition at the time of installation. All yards shall be maintained in a weed free condition and shall be a length not to exceed 8 inches per Firestone Municipal Code 8.03.210 .

Nonvegetative/Artificial turf grass - As provided by CRS §38-33.3-106.5(i)(I)(A), use of non-vegetative turf-grass commonly known as artificial turf-grass or synthetic turf-grass is permitted in the back/rear yard only, subject to the obtaining a permit and approval by the Town of Firestone. Property owner must provide a copy of the approved permit to the DRC as part of the review process. DRC will review the aesthetics of the Request, consisting of the type, number, and placement of artificial turf-grass. In considering the property owner's Design Review Request, the Design Review Committee shall also consider whether the property owner's proposed plan incorporates "water-wise landscaping", as defined in CRS §37-60-135(l). Artificial turf-grass shall be limited to the back/rear yard at a maximum of (75%). Live plant material shall be used on the remaining (25%) of rear yard with artificial turf-grass.

4. Design Guidelines 4.8 Hardscape Requirements

- Hardscapes include non-living hard surface elements in landscape architecture. It includes any constructed or built features made from durable materials like stone, concrete, brick, wood, metal or glass
- All hardscapes should be placed over a weed barrier fabric and be kept in place with a steel, plastic or brick/rock edger. All edging should be installed to prevent damming of water near the foundation.
- The Association may allow hardscapes as part of xeriscape or water-wise landscaping plans.
- The Association may not unreasonably **require** the use of hardscape on more than 20% of the landscaping area of a unit owner's property
- Hardscape is limited to 20% in front yards and 50% on side and back yards.
- Hardscape placement may be reviewed for safety, drainage, grading, maintenance, and visual compatibility.

5. Drought-Tolerant “water-wise” Planting Option

- Members may choose from several landscaping options for gardens from the brochures listed on the website, consisting of at least eighty percent drought-tolerant plantings. Members may also design their own plan for review.
- Drought-tolerant and native plants are encouraged as part of water-wise landscaping.

6. Vegetable/Flower Gardens Design Guidelines 2.5

- The Association allows vegetable/flower gardens which may be subject to reasonable design, placement, safety, and maintenance. Vegetable/flower gardens in the front yard cannot exceed 10%, backyard, or side yard of an owner’s property.
- A vegetable garden includes a ground plot or elevated soil bed used to grow pollinator plants, flowers, vegetables, herbs, fruits, leafy greens, or other edible plants are cultivated. Front Yard requirement nor more than 10% a border is required.
- Gardens shall either consist of one of the pre-planned water-wise garden designs that are compliant with garden designs established by the Colorado State University Extension Plant Selection Organization’s “Downloadable Designs” (<https://plantselect.org/design/downloadable-designs/>) OR the Association has a list of brochures on the website. Please provide the chosen garden and list the plants you are planning on using.
- “Water-wise designs, as used herein, are those approved in CRS §37-60-135(2)(1), which emphasize drought-tolerant and native plants, or be part of water conservation program operated by a local water provider.

Construction Requirements for Front Gardens

- Must not be within 8 feet of the sidewalk
- No more than 10% of the front and side yard square footage
- Structures to encourage vertical growing, including arbors, trellis, tree branch frames, fence sections and cages are only allowed during the growing season if they are functional, orderly, safe and attractive.

- Vertical structures used for growing must appear in good condition and contribute to the community garden's overall visual continuity.

Maintenance

- No Composting piles/containers are allowed.
- Must be kept clear of weeds, spent plants, debris and trash.
- Bags of topsoil, compost or manure are not to be stored in the Front or Side yards.

Fall Shut Down

- All gardens must be trimmed/cut down and cleaned up by (1st frost) including removal of spent vegetation/plants.
- All growing structures must be disassembled and removed from the site.

7. Preapproved Water-Wise Garden Designs

- The Association allows several preplanned water-wise garden designs that are preapproved for installation in members yards within the community.
- Preapproved designs must follow water-wise landscaping principles emphasizing drought-tolerant and native plants or be part of a water conservation program operated by a local water provider.
- Designs may be selected from Colorado State University Extension Plant Select downloadable designs or from a municipality, utility, or other entity that creates water-wise garden designs, or any other garden design of choice.
- Association maintains and updates information about water-wise garden designs on the website.

8. Safety, Drainage, and Structural Protections

- The Association has adopted the Town of Firestone's Final Development Plan (FDP) to maintain vegetation at a height to not exceed 8" for residential properties. Flowers in a garden with a defined boarder are an exception.
- Maintenance of the lawn/grass area" cannot exceed the 8" limit in height. Vegetative plants in a designated plant/garden areas i.e. (raised/defined beds) are

exempt from the 8” minimum height, but must be maintained in accordance with DG Section 2.5

- The Association may prohibit or restrict changes to existing grading, drainage, or other structural landscape elements when necessary to protect persons or property.

9. Enforcement and Compliance

- The Association maintains written standards for design, review submittals, and maintenance expectations, safety requirements, and any preapproved water-wise garden designs.
- Colorado Common Interest Ownership Act provides that:
An association may not levy fines against a homeowner for failure to adequately water their landscaping when water restrictions or guidelines from the local water district or similar entity are in place and the homeowner is watering in compliance with such restrictions or guidelines; and
- The association may require proof from the homeowner that the homeowner is watering the landscaping in a manner that is consistent with the maximum watering permitted by the restrictions or guidelines then in effect.
- During times of watering restrictions, homeowners are still required to maintain their landscaping and must water to the extent they are permitted by the applicable restrictions.
- Board has adopted a Watering Restrictions Resolution for 2026. (see document on website)
- Homeowners cannot simply neglect their landscaping, stop watering, and allow the landscaping to die.

Definitions and Resources:

Hardscape - the man-made features used in landscape architecture, e.g. paths or walls, as contrasted with vegetation. "Hardscape can take any manner of structure"

Hardscape refers to the non-living, structural elements in landscape design, like patios, walkways, retaining walls, and fire pits, built from materials such as stone, concrete, brick, and wood to provide functionality, organization, and aesthetic appeal to outdoor spaces, contrasting with "softscape," which includes living plants. These built features create the framework and flow for a yard, transforming it into usable areas for recreation and defining spaces.

Hardscape includes inanimate, built elements that are common in yards and outdoor living spaces. Whether they are made from concrete, brick, pebbles, or sand, outdoor features such as walkways, paths, driveways, and sidewalks are hardscape. Decks, patios, fireplaces, terraces, and porches also qualify as hardscape.

Yard - The grassy area right outside a house is a yard. A yard is often surrounded by a fence or marked by shrubs or other plants. Most suburban houses have both a front yard and a back yard — sometimes side yards too.

A house yard is the outdoor, often fenced-in area of land immediately adjacent to or surrounding a residence. It serves as private open space for recreation, gardening, or storage and is generally divided into front, back, or side yards. Yards typically feature grass, trees, and, in some regions, a patio or paved area.

Key Aspects of a House Yard:

Definition & Location: It is the ground surrounding a building, often used for leisure or gardening.

Types:

- **Front Yard:** The space between the front of the house and the street, often used for landscaping.
- **Backyard:** The area behind the house, typically more private and used for activities like barbecues or gardening.
- **Side Yard:** The narrow strip of land along the sides of the house.
- **Components:** Yards may include lawns, gardens, patios, decks, or storage sheds.
- **Alternative Regional Definition:** In some contexts, particularly in certain apartment, condo, or specific international floorplans, a "yard" might refer to a small, paved service area, often located near the kitchen, used for laundry.

Lawn - "Lawn" means land area covered with turf kept closely mown or land area covered with turf, trees, and shrubs.

What is the difference between grass and lawn?

Grass refers to the plant itself while a lawn is used to refer to the area at the front or back of a house, or grass that is grown on any other commercial or residential land. Turf is another term used in association to grass.

Living Plant Material - Living plant material refers to living organisms or their viable parts—such as seeds, seedlings, roots, cuttings, or mature plants—capable of growth, metabolism, and propagation. It comprises fresh vegetable matter that remains turgid, including foliage, fruits, and roots. This material must be alive and connected to its source or in a state to continue living.

Key aspects of living plant material include:

- Propagation & Growth: It is capable of developing into a new plant or continuing to grow (e.g., seedlings, rooted cuttings).
- Physiological Activity: The material is actively respiring, needing to remain turgid (water-filled).
- Components: This includes whole plants, flowers, seeds, roots, bark, and cuttings.
- Examples: Fresh produce, nursery stock, air plants, live roots, and tubers.
- Context: Used in horticulture, agriculture, and botany to describe, track, and manage specific plant accessions or for propagation.

In contrast to dead or preserved plant materials, living plant material is defined by its ability to maintain physiological functions.

Xeriscape - Xeriscape landscaping is a water-conserving design method, derived from the Greek Xero's (dry), that reduces or eliminates the need for supplemental irrigation. It uses native, drought-tolerant plants, specialized soil improvements, efficient irrigation, and mulch to create sustainable, low-maintenance landscapes. It is not just rocks, but a tailored planting design.

Benefits

Water Conservation: Significantly reduces water usage, especially in arid climates.

Cost Savings: Lower water bills and reduced maintenance costs.

Environmental Impact: Decreases runoff, supports biodiversity, and reduces the need for fertilizers.

Common Misconceptions

It is not just a "rock garden": While materials like gravel are used, a properly designed xeriscape can be lush and green.

It is not zero maintenance: While it requires less water and care than a traditional lawn, it still requires regular maintenance.

Xeriscaping (pronounced ZEER-uh-scaping, not zero-scaping) is a combination of landscaping techniques that reduce the need for irrigation. In other words, it's all about creating a garden that thrives on minimal water.

CSU What best describes xeriscaping?

Xeriscaping is a term used to describe land- scaping that intentionally conserves resources, especially water, and can include using native or drought tolerant plants, or using alternatives to irrigation dependent turf and vegetation. For many reasons, it is cheaper and wiser to landscape with native plants.

What is Xeriscape?

It's not a specific look or specific group of plants. Rather, it's a diverse combination of low-water plants and materials that create a beautiful and water-wise landscape. A thriving Xeriscape uses seven common-sense gardening principles to save water, time and resources.

The Seven Principles of Xeriscape

- Plan for water conservation and beauty from the start. Create a design makes it easy to complete your project in phases.
- Create Practical Turf areas of manageable size, shape and grade. In areas that receive a lot of foot traffic, Kentucky Bluegrass is likely the best choice. Just keep those areas to a minimum. Make sure they're relatively flat so that you can irrigate efficiently.
- Select Low-Water Plants and group them according to their water needs. This is also known as hydro zoning. Do some research on your plants to determine their water needs, then experiment with watering at home to see what works best for your landscape.
- Use high-quality Soil Amendments as you plant. An organic, #1 or #2 Compost is the best choice. The number designation means it has fewer salts that could build up in the soil and harm your plants.

- Use Mulches, organic (like wood chip) or inorganic (like river rock) to reduce evaporation and to keep the soil cool. Some plants prefer one or the other, so be sure to do your research.
- Irrigate efficiently with properly designed systems and by applying the right amount of water at the right time. If you hand water, be sure to use a nozzle on the end of your hose.
- Maintain your Xeriscape properly by mowing, weeding, pruning and fertilizing according to each plant's needs.

Gardening What is the 70/30 rule in gardening?

The 70/30 planting rule is a versatile guideline with two main interpretations: one suggests planting 70% reliable, native, or structural plants for a strong garden foundation, while using the other 30% for experimental, colorful annuals or non-invasive ornamentals for seasonal interest and biodiversity, often attributed to entomologist Dr. Doug Tallamy for wildlife support. Another version emphasizes 70% hardy, easy-to-grow "safe" plants in blocks, with 30% for sporadic, unique additions to create a balanced cottage garden look that's both successful and surprising, notes The Middle-Sized Garden.

Native Plants - Native plants are species that evolved naturally in a specific region, ecosystem, or habitat without human intervention. These indigenous plants have adapted to local climate, soil conditions, and wildlife over thousands of years, making them sustainable, water-efficient, and essential for supporting local biodiversity, pollinators, and food webs.

Key Characteristics and Definitions

- Contextual Definition: Plants found in a specific area prior to significant habitat alteration, often defined in North America as existing before European settlement.
- Natural Adaptation: They are perfectly suited to local moisture, soil, and weather conditions, requiring little to no supplemental watering, fertilizers, or pesticides.
- Ecological Role: Native plants have coevolved with local insects, fungi, and wildlife, forming the foundation of, and providing necessary habitat for, local ecosystems.
- Distinction from Non-Native: Unlike non-native or introduced species, native plants have developed complex, interdependent relationships with local fauna.
- Root Systems: Many native plants have deep, complex root systems that stabilize soil, reduce erosion, and improve water infiltration.

Examples:

- Buttonbush: Native to all regions of Maryland.

- Red Maple: Native from Florida to Canada.
- Butterfly Milkweed: A crucial host plant for butterflies.

Benefits:

- Biodiversity: Native oaks, for example, can host over 550 species of moths and butterflies, compared to just 5 for the non-native Ginkgo tree.
- Sustainability: Requires less maintenance and fewer inputs.
- Environmental Protection: Helps manage stormwater runoff and sequesters carbon.

A native plant is a plant that is a part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds or thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem.

The textbook definition of native plants is they are the plants that have been growing in area prior to European settlement. Another way to define native plants is : Native plants evolved or adapted to our local environment for thousands of years, and are an important part of our local habitats, ecosystems and ecosystem services (pollination, infiltration, carbon sequestration, etc). They are the most sustainable plants for our specific area. Our native plants not only adapted physically, but chemically and genetically.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture definition of “native plant” is “a plant that lives or grows naturally in a particular region without direct or indirect human intervention.” That definition also might apply to many “naturalized” plants that were introduced long ago, but are now thriving and spreading without human ...

Native landscaping uses colorful native plants, ornamentals, or a combination of the two, to create a natural landscape that manages rainwater while beautifying your yard. Native plants have deep growing root systems that help break up the soil, allowing more water to drain into the ground.

Native species are plants and animals that originated and live in an area without any human intervention. Introduced, or non-native species, have been brought to their current locations by humans and often become invasive, or too pervasive for the environment.