

PE7 Action: Water-smart Landscaping

1 — 9 Points

A. Why is this action important?

A changing climate is bringing more frequent summer droughts and greater uncertainty for water supplies. Reducing lawn and garden irrigation needs could alleviate water shortages in summer months. Communities can save water through water-smart landscaping. This practice starts with good planning and site design and emphasizes native, disease-resistant plants that are well-suited for local soils and climate. Native plant species tend to benefit wildlife more than non-native species, thereby improving wildlife habitat and quality of life in the community. Once established, these plants require less watering, mowing, and maintenance than traditional lawns and landscapes. Benefits to the community include cost-savings and reduced water demand.

Key principles to water-smart landscaping, also called xeriscaping, include the following:

- Develop a well-thought out landscape plan and design.
- Choose natives or plants that need less water.
- Group plants with similar water needs (hydrozoning).
- Limit turf grass to practical areas and substitute native grasses, as feasible
- If needed, use efficient irrigation systems including proper timing of watering (e.g., avoid heat of the day).
- Use organic soil amendments as needed (for nutrients).
- Use mulches to reduce evaporation and weeds
- Maintain the landscape through practices like mulching, weeding, and thatching.

B. How to implement this action

To implement this Climate Smart Communities (CSC) action, local governments should consider the following strategies:

Education and outreach: Provide the public, community groups, businesses, developers, planning/zoning boards, and/or building department staff with education about water-smart landscaping. Highlight what plantings and designs are suitable for local applications. Educational opportunities may include offering training programs or may be as simple as providing printed materials. Conservation advisory committees, garden club master gardener programs, or other interested local groups could support the initiative. Some municipalities provide financial incentives to encourage residents and businesses to use water-smart landscaping design and practices. See examples below in section G.

Demonstration sites: Implement water-smart landscaping at facilities owned by the local government. Install educational signs so that visitors can learn about the features that have been implemented. This CSC action offers a range of points for this type of project based on the square feet (sq ft) of the site.

Local ordinances or regulations: Adopt an ordinance or regulation to require or incentivize the use of water-smart landscaping in new commercial/industrial developments. For example, a landscape model ordinance could set specific standards for drought-resistant plants that require less water (“xeriscaping”). Alternatively, site plan and subdivision regulations could be modified. See examples below in section G.

C. Timeframe, project costs, and resource needs

The costs associated with implementing this action and the additional staff time needed will vary with the type of project.

Local volunteer organizations can support the education and outreach component as well as installations. Water-smart landscaping will require planning and design as well as construction during the growing season. Successful projects may take more than one growing season to complete for monitoring. Businesses and homeowners install water-smart landscaping measures at their own cost. A local government can likely initiate a water-smart landscaping program that amends site plan and subdivision regulations within six to nine months.

D. Which local governments implement this action? Which departments within the local government are most likely to have responsibility for this action?

This action is applicable to all types of local governments. The department or staff that lead climate and sustainability efforts are likely to be responsible for this action. Projects may involve the planning department groundskeepers, and/or a volunteer body, such as a Conservation Advisory Council, watershed group, or a local garden club. Cross-department involvement and support are recommended, along with support and involvement from the CSC task force.

E. How to obtain points for this action

Points for this action are tiered based on completion of the components described below. Each tier has a different lookback period.

	POSSIBLE POINTS
Outreach: Provide education for the public, local boards, and/or staff about the benefits of water-smart landscaping at least once in the last five years	1
Demonstration sites: Implement water-smart landscaping at a government facility in the last ten years.	
Landscaped area between 1,000 and 5,000 sq ft	2
Landscaped area more than 5,000 sq ft	3
Adopt an ordinance or regulation to require or incentivize the use of water-smart landscaping in new commercial/industrial developments (at any time prior)	3

F. What to submit

For the outreach tier: Submit copies of educational materials as well as a description of the method of distribution (mailed pamphlets, board presentations, table events, training programs, etc.), dates of distribution, and recipient groups (e.g., public, local boards, staff, etc.). Educational efforts must have occurred within the last five years.

For demonstration sites: Submit before and after photos with dates. The installation must have occurred within the last ten years. Provide project address, description, size in square feet. Also submit site plans, if available.

For ordinance: Submit copies of (or links to) the adopted ordinance/regulation requiring or incentivizing water-smart landscaping in new commercial/industrial developments. The ordinance/regulation may have been adopted at any time prior to the date of application.

All CSC action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submittals should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

G. Links to additional resources or examples

- [US Department of Agriculture Plant Hardiness Zone Map](#)
- [User-friendly Guide: US Fish and Wildlife Service “Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation](#)

[Landscaping – Chesapeake Bay Watershed” – includes New York State, Extensive plant list \(PDF\)](#)

- [Demonstration Garden SUNY Ulster, Stoneridge, NY](#)
- [The Native Plant Center – Westchester County with extensive list of resources and demo garden](#)
- [US Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) WaterSense Water-Smart Outdoors webpage](#)
- [US EPA Water-Efficient Landscaping \(PDF\)](#)
- [Colorado State University Xeriscaping Fact Sheet. Practical Guide with Resource Links](#)
- [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center – New York native plant list. Search allows light requirements, soil moisture conditions, plant height and more](#)
- [Education and Outreach Example: Ocean Friendly Garden Program by the Surfrider Foundation](#)
- [Massachusetts Guide to Lawn and Landscape Water Conservation \(PDF, see Section II. Municipal By-law and Ordinance Development on page 8\)](#)
- [Friends of the Verde River: Landscaping and Screening Codes and Standards](#)
- [Scenic America Landscaping Model Ordinance](#)
- [Highland Beach, FL Code of Ordinances: Xeriscape—landscape Requirements, Installation And Maintenance](#)
- [State of Florida Xeriscaping Law](#)
- [Denver Water Department Xeriscaping Plans](#)

H. Recertification Requirements

The recertification requirements are the same as the initial certification requirements.