



City of Palm Springs

Department of Planning Services

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR APPLICANTS

(revised December 2015)

Topic: TURF REMOVAL and WATER EFFICIENT LANDSCAPES

Planning a turf removal project at your home, business, office complex or home-owners association?

“Turf-buy-back” programs offered by the City and Water Agency are a great way to start, but converting a landscape requires more than replacing grass with gravel.

Converting a landscape from “grass and petunias” to “groundcovers and succulents” should not result in a dry barren look! Professional landscape designers can help you choose hardy plants that meet the new water-efficient regulations and retain the GREEN! Here are some basic suggestions for creating LUSH but EFFICIENT parkways, medians, and other landscapes...”after the grass is gone”.

1. Rock, Gravel or decomposed granite – not more than 50% of your landscape.

- a. **Not more than 50% gravels** (called “inert groundcover”) or decomposed granite should comprise the area of your landscape project.
- b. **Sandy colored.** Gravels and decomposed granite are available in many colors. Because most of Palm Springs lies on the sandy flat part of the valley, sand-colored, light gold or light brown gravels and granites create the most natural-looking landscapes and are best when used in parkways, medians, and front yards. In large parkways such as Sunrise Way, East Palm Canyon Drive, these are good colors to use for the “inert groundcover” areas and help each section of parkway visually blend with the next.
- c. **Rocks in Clusters.** Clustering piles of accent rocks and boulders together in greys, reds, and browns is a way to bring the natural “desert varnish” seen on the surrounding mountainsides into your design.
- d. **Dry Streambeds.** Where there’s enough space, creative placement of rock in a slight “gulley” can give the appearance of a dry streambed. See more details later in this guide for creating natural-looking dry streambeds.

2. Groundcover plants – the other 50%.

The other 50%. Groundcover and shrubs should cover the remaining half of your project area.

Here are some water-efficient groundcover plants to consider:

 Natal Plum (Carissa)	 Bacharis	 Sierra Gold Dalea	 Yellow Dot	 Bush Morning Glory
 Ice Plant (Drosanthemum)	 Blackfoot Daisy	 Purple Trailing Lantana	 Trailing Gazania	 Japanese Garden Juniper
 New Gold Lantana	 Trailing Indigo Bush	 Trailing Rosemary	 Peruvian Verbena	 Small Leaf Myoporum

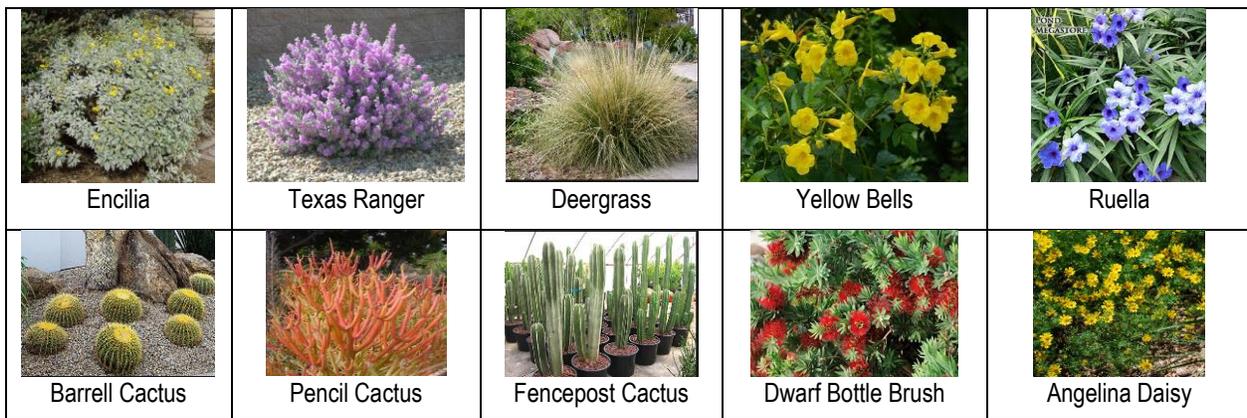
3. Put groups of the same type of plants together – 6 to 12 in a cluster.

When designing a landscape, plants look best when several of the same variety are planted together.

- Like a certain plant? Buy a dozen.** Plant a dozen of your favorite plant. Draw a good-sized circle on the ground and plant a dozen of the same plants together. Then, leave several feet of open space for gravel or granite. Eight or ten feet away, create another grouping of the same or different plants.
- Creating groupings of the same plant.** Planting clusters of the same plant type with some open space between the clusters creates variety and allows your eye to move from one grouping to another. This is what Landscape Architects mean when they say “*create movement in the design of your landscape.*”

4. Choose some leafy plants and some “prickly” plants for visual VARIETY.

- Vary the HEIGHT of plants.** Plan some clusters of low lying plants and then a cluster of taller plants. Select some plants in your water-efficient landscape that stay low-to-the-ground and some that are tall. For example a nice carpet of NATAL PLUM can form a lush groundcover and behind it you might choose NEW GOLD LANTANA or TEXAS RANGER which has a bit more height.
- Vary the TEXTURE of plants.** Bunch together a dozen “prickly” plants like CACTUS or AGAVE, then leave some open space with your “inert groundcovers”, and then some “soft” plant such as ENCILIA or DEERGRASS for visual variety. The plants below represent a sampling of different colors, textures, and height. All these plants should be arranged in groups or clusters, never “*one here and one there*”.
- Vary the COLOR.** Even in the heat of the summer or the chilly nights of winter, there are rich color variations in desert plants. Consider a punch of color in one or two areas of your landscape.



- A brief word about Agaves:** Like all live plants, agave are vulnerable to insects and disease. If you include agaves in your new landscape plan, be prepared to treat them annually against agave weevils, a beetle-like insect that eats the insides out of an agave and ultimately kills them. Sagging, drooping or withered spears on the agave are the telltale sign, and by the time you see it, it’s usually too late to save the plant. Best to remove it, inspect other agave in your garden nearby, and treat against agave weevil right away. Your favorite garden or home improvement store can advise you on proper care and treatment.



- “Lead by Example”.** There are many wonderful examples around town of water efficient landscaping in parkways, medians, and front yards. Notice in the photos below many of the design principals noted above: roughly

50% groundcover, 50% “inert” gravels, texture, color, variation in height, “visual movement” such that the planting draws your eye from area to area.

The following pages contain photos of landscape parkway and medians that have been done around Palm Springs in a water-efficient manner:

 <p>Deergrass behind Red Yucca</p>	 <p>Clusters of Aloe and Creeping Bottle Brush</p>	 <p>A nice grouping of Agave</p>
 <p>Sandy field with dry streambed (remember rushing water pushes the big rocks to the side, smaller rocks in a jumble in the middle; irregular, scattered)</p>	 <p>Linear movement using deergrass</p>	 <p>Deergrass, Natal Plum, dark boulders light colors gravel</p>
 <p>Aloe and Purple Lantana</p>	 <p>Aloe and sandy decomposed granite</p>	 <p>A field of gazanias</p>

If you are unsure of what a good example of a well-designed landscape might look like, go ahead and take a few photos of landscapes that appeal to you and bring it in to the Planning Department, one of our knowledgeable planners can review it and give you some suggestions.

7. “Inert Groundcovers” ... also known as “gravel and decomposed granites”

Choose a neutral ‘sandy’ color, the natural tones of the sandy valley floor in which Palm Springs is located. This color will be used for roughly 50% of your landscape. Select from the colors below for your inert groundcover for

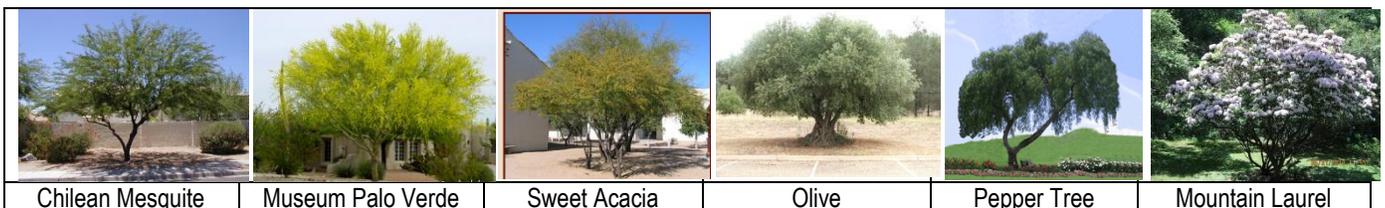
parkways and medians along the streetfront. For accents of clusters of boulders or rocks, explore some of the river rock or crushed rock that capture the dark “desert varnish” seen on rocks from the surrounding mountains:



8. Trees: Giving shade to you, your garden, your vehicles and your home.



Who hasn't circled a parking lot looking for that last shaded parking space under a tree? Trees are a natural refuge from the harsh desert sun and an important component of a drought tolerant landscape. There are many species of drought tolerant trees. Some popular ones are noted below but there are many other tree species to choose from.



When choosing and locating a shade tree, be mindful of the tree's full size at maturity and that it is provided with adequate ground space for establishing strong roots. Consider including shade trees near sidewalks, parking lots and driveways but allow roughly a six foot by six foot ground area for healthy root growth and development.

9. Financial Incentives and Assistance – Desert Water Agency (DWA) and Palm Springs Sustainability Department.

From time to time, the City of Palm Springs and the Desert Water Agency (DWA) offer financial incentives for property owners to remove water-thirsty turf and install drought tolerant landscapes. The DWA has its own technical assistance guidelines and frequently-asked-questions on line at (www.dwa.org/turf). There you can find tons of information on drought tolerant trees, shrubs, groundcovers, vines, charts explaining plant coverage-at-maturity, application forms and more.



From time to time, the City also offers financial incentive programs for turf removal. Check with the Palm Springs Sustainability Department for forms and instructions. (www.watermattersps.com). Both programs are administered slightly differently and offer different incentives.

Begin by reading over both agency's incentive program instructions and qualifications. City-offered turf-removal incentive programs are coordinated between the Sustainability Department, the Planning Department and the DWA. The Sustainability Department administers the financial incentive component, the Planning Department administers the landscape design review component, and the DWA reviews the technical aspects for conformance with the City's Drought Tolerant Landscape Ordinance. Phone numbers: Sustainability: 760.323.8214; Planning: 760.323.8245; Desert Water Agency: 760.323.4971 and websites are listed at the end of this document.

For more information on the City's water conservation ordinance, visit (www.qcodes.us/codes/palmsprings/). Chapter 8.60 of the Municipal Code is the water-efficient landscape ordinance and Chapter 11.06 is the water conservation ordinance.

10. Putting your Ideas on paper – Getting City Approvals.

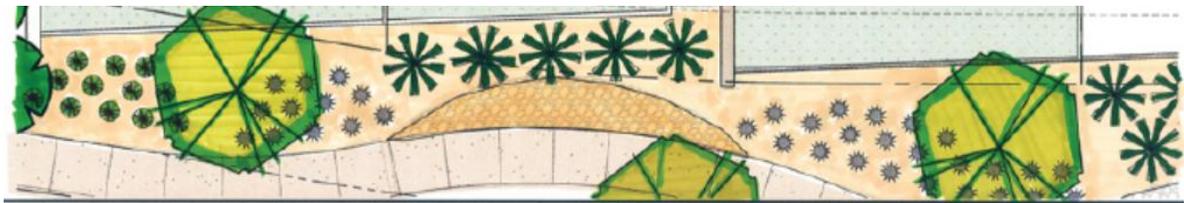
How does one get a water-efficient landscape plan designed and drawn that the City or DWA will approve?

- a. **Architectural Review for Landscapes?** Yes, The Zoning Code terminology for review of landscapes is called "architectural review"; it simply means review against a standard set of guidelines. Use the form "[Minor Architectural Application](#)" found on the Planning homepage of the City website (www.palmspringsca.gov) which provides submittal instructions.
- b. **"Over the Counter" approvals or "AAC Review Required?"** Landscape revisions more than 5,000 square feet in area are reviewed by the City's Architectural Advisory Committee. Those less than 5,000 square feet may be reviewed by staff for a staff level approval or staff may request AAC recommendation before making a decision on the application. Typically, larger turf removal projects require more review than can be done "over-the-counter". Follow the suggestions in this technical assistance guide – the design guidelines here and those from the "architectural review" section of the zoning code (Section 94.04) are the basis of evaluation for conformance of landscapes.
- c. **Landscape Submittal Requirements:** Landscape plans, like building plans, must be drawn clearly to convey the information necessary for the City to grant an approval. Here is a sample Plant List or "Legend" showing the minimum required information:
 - i. **Plant Name and Symbol.** It doesn't matter what symbol you use for each plant, but identify the plant name associated with each symbol that you use in the Legend (see example below).

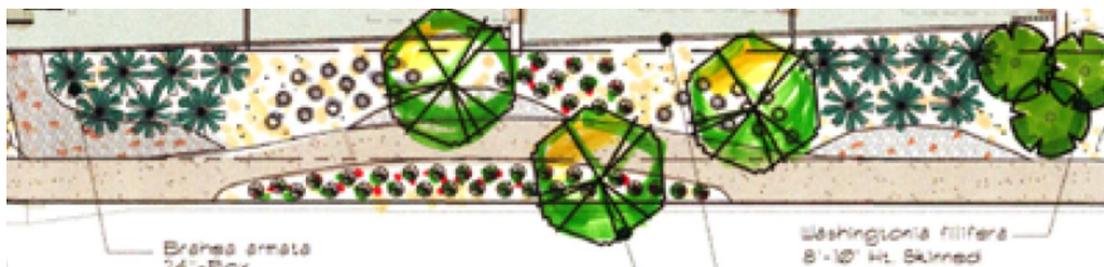
- ii. Quantity of each plant type.
- iii. Size (usually in gallons or with trees, specified as “24 inch, 36 inch or 42 inch box”).
- iv. Area of the landscape allocated for each plant type. This helps you visually plan your landscape. **IMPORTANT:** show the plant symbols at roughly the size of the plant at its maturity. The DWA plant list has a handy “coverage” listing for each drought tolerant plant type.
- v. Estimated water use (Plant nurseries may be able to assist you with this info).

SAMPLE PLANT LIST OR LEGEND: (for your proposed drought tolerant landscape, create a plant list like this:)					
Plant ID symbol	Plant Name	Quantity	Size (gallons)	Area Coverage	Water Use
1 	Natal Plum	24	1 gallon	8 ft x 15 ft	Mod. 0.5
2 	Deergrass	18	5 gallon	2 ft x 18 ft	Low 0.2
3 	Texas Ranger Bush	15	15 gallon	3 ft x 9 ft	Mod. 0.5
4 	Creeping Rosemary	9	1 gallon	2 ft x 12 ft	Mod. 0.5
5 	Firecracker Bush	12	5 gallon	10 ft x 12 ft	Low 0.2
6 	Red Bougainvillea	9	5 gallon	2 ft x 12 ft	Mod. 0.5

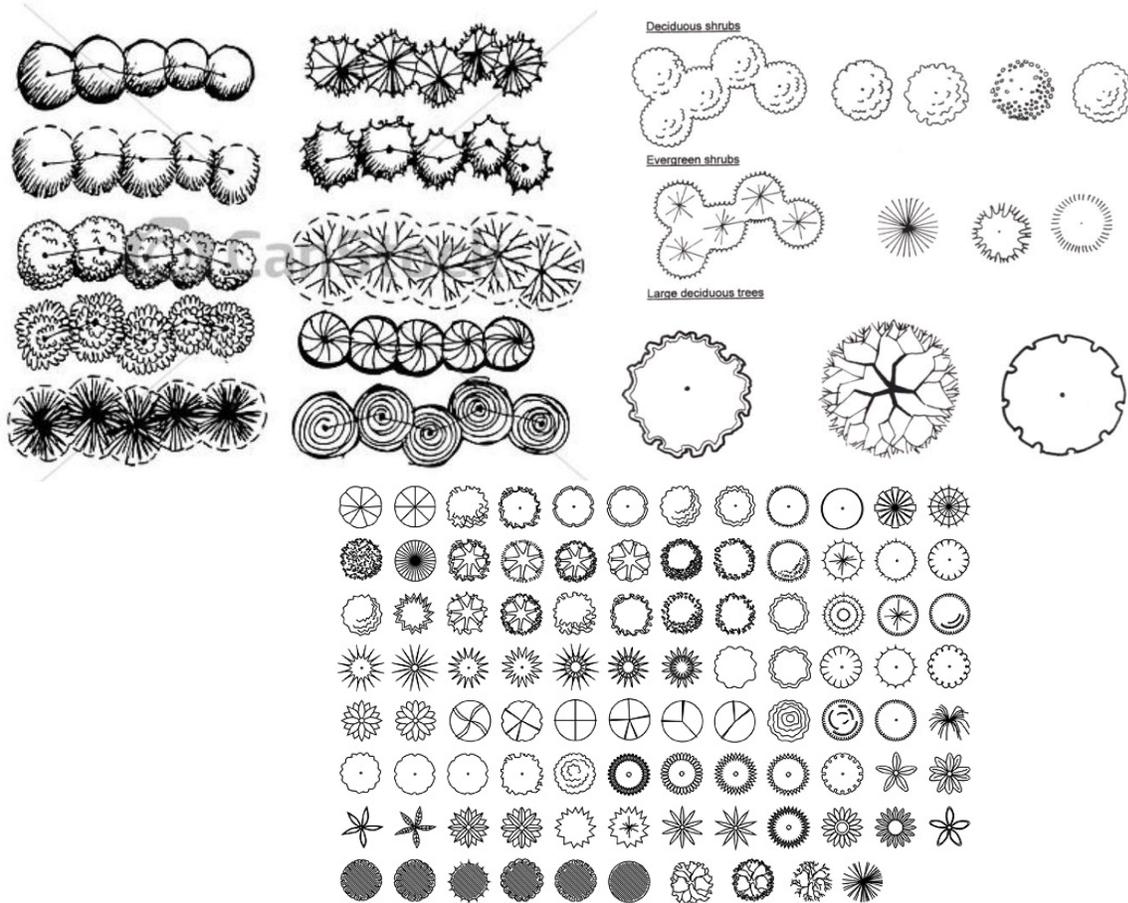
d. **But what if we can't afford a landscape architect? Does the Planning Department have standard landscape templates we can just apply to our project?** We don't have templates, however we can point to examples of good landscape design around town. The City encourages project applicants to seek assistance from professional landscape consultants. Many good desert landscape ideas can be found via an on-line search for “drought tolerant landscapes” or “water efficient landscapes”. On the next page are examples of simple landscape plans for parkways and medians. There are also many examples of plant symbols one could use. Use a different symbol for each plant type. Notice the grouping or clustering of similar plants together with open areas of “inert groundcover” (gravel and granite) in between. Notice also the plants symbols are showing the relative size of the plant at maturity, tree symbols are bigger and small shrub symbols are smaller.



The specific plant selections are not identified, but all the ideas of clustering, open space, variety in texture, height, movement and gravel variations are present in these little pattern sketches.



Below are sample plant symbols you might use in your own landscape plan.



11. Additional Resources:

- Palm Springs Planning Department – 760 323 8245; www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning
- Palm Springs Sustainability Department – 760 323 8214; www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/sustainability-and-recycling
- Desert Water Agency – 760 323 4971; www.dwa.org/turf. (Great information on plant sizes at maturity and much more)
- Coachella Valley Water District CVWD publication: “Lush & Efficient, Landscape Gardening in the Coachella Valley” www.cvwd.org/conservation/lush_book (Great information on plant species appropriate for our climate).
- The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California www.bewaterwise.com (plant guides and related info).

Further questions? Contact the Palm Springs Planning Department at 760 323 8245

*“The Desert... when the sun comes up...
I couldn't tell where heaven stopped and Earth began....
--Tom Hanks*