



Cash for Grass Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What plants can I use in my water-efficient landscape?

A: The Cash for Grass Rebate Program does not require particular plants, only that when fully mature, the plants cover at least fifty percent (50%) of the converted area. An applicant can use any low and/or medium water use plants to meet this requirement, but Sacramento County Water Agency (SCWA) highly encourages the use of drought tolerant and native species. The [recommended plant list](#) provides excellent landscaping options. An applicant should also consider keeping any existing trees because they provide shade to one's home and landscape.

The recommend list of most commonly used low and/or medium water use plants in the Sacramento Valley region can be found on the Cash for Grass program website by following the [Recommended Plant Lists](#) link to the Ecolandscape California website. This list provides both the plant's common name and its botanical name. The list includes the mature size of each plant in square feet to help ensure that applicant's meet the fifty percent (50%) coverage requirement. If an applicant chooses plants that are not included on the plant list, the applicant must provide SCWA with the water use and coverage requirements of the chosen plants. High water use plants, trees, grass and invasive species are excluded from the program and do not meet the program terms and conditions.

Q: How do I determine if I've met the minimum plant coverage requirement of fifty percent (50%)?

A: SCWA provides a plant coverage worksheet on our website to help applicants confirm that they have met the fifty percent (50%) coverage requirement. Please see the [Plant Coverage Worksheet](#) Instructions on how to complete the worksheet. A completed worksheet is due at the time of the post-inspection visit.

Q: Why does the SCWA require plants?

A: This program encourages the use of water efficient landscaping, and the County wants that landscaping 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, reduce storm water runoff and save water.

Q: I have many plants surrounding the grass that I'm removing. Will these plants count toward the 50 percent (50%) coverage requirement?

A: If the total area of an existing front yard landscape contains more than seventy-five percent (75%) of living water efficient plant material that is being irrigated with a low volume irrigation system, the fifty percent (50%) living plant coverage requirement can be waived.

Q: I have an established tree located within the conversion area. Will the tree count toward the 50 percent (50%) coverage requirement?

A: If an established tree is located within the converted area, the applicant can use one-half (1/2) of the total mature tree canopy towards the living fifty percent (50%) plant coverage requirement.

Q: Do plants have to cover 50 percent (50%) of the conversion area when you come and inspect my landscape?

A: An applicant can choose plants at any size. Planting smaller plants (1 gallon) are less expensive and have a tendency to adapt better to their new environment. The calculations you submitted for the mature plant size will be considered to reach the 50 percent requirement, not the size of the plants when we inspect.

Q: Why do I need a filter and pressure regulator?

A: The emitters on a drip irrigation system have very small openings for the water to pass through. A filter prevents sediment from clogging emitters, ensuring that 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). Not installing a pressure regulator may cause fittings and lines to fail, creating wasteful breaks and leaks in your system.

Q: Do I need an existing irrigation system to participate in the program?

A: No, you are not required to have an existing irrigation system to participate in the program.

Q: What is considered to be an efficient irrigation system?

A: The installation of an efficient irrigation system begins with good design. A low volume drip system is a proper choice for trees, plants and shrubs applying water directly to the plants roots. For turf areas, systems must apply water uniformly over the desired area with a minimum of overspray into adjacent areas. There are sprinkler heads on the market today that offer low precipitation rates (such as rotating spray heads) that save water and allow the soil to absorb the applied water minimizing any runoff. SCWA recommends installing a smart irrigation timer that (after proper programming) automatically adjusts itself to provide the right amount of water to your landscape. Please see the terms and conditions for more details on efficient irrigation requirements if a watering system will be used.

Q: I turned off the water on my grass and it has started to die. Can I still qualify for the program?

A: In normal water years, no. Turf must be currently maintained. However, turf dying in response to the current drought conditions can still be eligible for funding.

Q: Can I receive credit for replacing my high water use grass with a low water use grass?

A: No. This program provides incentive to convert grass to alternative types of landscaping, including trees, shrubs and groundcovers. These use less water than even the lowest water use grass. However, we encourage homeowners to use low water use grass in those areas where grass is needed or desired outside of this program.

Q: Can I receive credit for replacing my lawn with artificial turf?

A: The County will accept artificial turf as a substitute for irrigated lawn. Any artificial turf must be installed by a licensed contractor and be permeable (allowing both air and water to pass through freely). Installation must meet all other program terms and conditions and in compliance with County and/or City codes and ordinances.

Q: Can I receive credit for putting in a patio, a walkway or an extension to my driveway?

A: Yes. If the applicant will be removing turf to install a patio, a walkway or a driveway extension, SCWA will allow credit if a permeable product is used. Permeable products include pervious, permeable and/or porous pavers or pervious concrete, or surfaces with decomposed granite or cobble. All of these options reduce the amount of water runoff by allowing water to pass through the surface and be absorbed into the soil beneath. Keep in mind that the conversion area must still meet the fifty percent (50%) living plant coverage requirement.

Q: Do I get credit for removing my high water use plants?

A: No. The Cash for Grass program focuses solely on the removal of turf grass. However, most shrub beds may be watered more effectively by converting the irrigation system to a drip irrigation system.

Q: What is mulch and why is it required?

A: The most common types of mulch are decorative rock or bark. Mulch helps maintain the moisture level. Wood mulches help retain the temperature of the soil. Without mulch, wind and heat pull the moisture out of the soil and more water is then needed to keep plants healthy. Also, the temperature of the soil constantly fluctuates causing plants a lot of stress. Additional benefits include the reduction of weed growth, erosion and certain insect diseases. A minimum of 3" layer of mulch is required.

Q: Do I have to use a weed barrier?

A: No. Weed barriers are generally recommended in areas that have a particular weed problem (i.e. areas where Bermuda grass is being removed or under permeable surfaces such as patios and walkways where plants will not be grown). If a weed barrier is used, SCWA requires that it be permeable allowing both water and air to penetrate.

Q: Are vegetable gardens allowed?

A: Vegetable gardens are excluded from the Cash for Grass Program.

Q: What should I do with my small side yard?

A: When converting a front yard landscape, we highly encourage applicants to include the narrow side yard and mow strips as part of their conversion as long as the side yard is not behind the fence. Turf in these areas can be difficult to maintain and use large amounts of water.

Q: If I have children and/or a dog, how do I incorporate water efficient landscaping into my yard?

A: An applicant does not have to eliminate all of their lawn area to participate. Some conversion projects simply involve reducing the amount of lawn area or creating a buffer area around the edge of an existing lawn.

Q: What if my Homeowner's Association or CC&Rs requires me to keep grass in my yard?

A: To avoid problems, an applicant must make certain to follow all applicable laws, rules, appropriate HOA and CC&R policies that may apply to any anticipated landscaping project.

Q: I don't like the desert look. What are my options?

A: Water efficient landscaping can be much more than rocks and cactus. There are hundreds of plants that use very little, if any, water. With proper design and plant selection, an applicant can accomplish almost any look or feel and still save water. View the SCWA website for design ideas.

Q: Where can I find resources for design ideas, irrigation, and other landscape-related information?

A: Please visit www.scwa.net and follow the link to EcoLandscape.

Q: Can I apply for the Cash for Grass program more than once?

A: Yes, but you may only participate in the cash for grass rebate program once per year.

Q: Can I apply for more than one SCWA rebate program?

A: Yes, you may apply for other rebate programs offered while participating in the Cash for Grass rebate program. Please visit www.scwa.net to view the other rebate programs being offered.

Q: I can't find my Sacramento County Consolidated Utilities Account Number?

A: You can view your account number on your Sacramento County Consolidated Utilities billing Service (CUBS) bill, or call 875-5555 CUBS between the hours of 7:30am to 5:30 pm Monday through Friday to obtain your account number.

Q: Can I apply to convert my backyard?

A: We encourage front yard conversion projects. The projects primary focus is front lawns and/or side lawns. Backyards will be acceptable only if the front yard has been or will be entirely replaced with a Program compliant yard.

Q: Do commercial applicants need to coordinate with their jurisdictional Planning Department during the Cash for Grass process?

A: Commercial applicants will need to submit complete landscape re-design and irrigation plans that are consistent with the requirements of the Water Use and Conservation Ordinance and Zoning Code for landscaping to the local Planning Department for review and approval.

Q: What if I am on a private well water or irrigated my lawn with recycled water?

A: Customers who irrigate with recycled water or with a private well do not qualify for the SCWA Cash for Grass rebate program.