GARDEN STYLE SAN ANTONIO

LANDSCAPE CARE GUIDE

GET INSPIRED
Seasonal stars to design your ideal landscape

YEAR-ROUND CARE CHECKLISTS
Monthly tips to simplify maintenance

GardenStyleSA.com

San Antonio Water System

Icon guide

- Texas native
- Butterflies
- Hummingbirds
- Pollinators
- Deer resistant
- Evergreeen
- Full sun
- Partial sun/shade
- Full shade

Seasonal stars guide

Plant name

Red yucca

Botanical name

Hesperaloe parvifolia

Plant type

Succulent

Attributes

Sunlight requirements

Description

Red yucca is a thornless architectural evergreen with fleshy leaves that store water. It blooms profusely from spring to summer, making it a stalwart in the hummingbird garden.

Foreword

In my time off, I enjoy container gardening with cactus, succulents and plant propagation. They add to the beauty of the outdoors and use very little water.

As the longest-serving President/CEO of SAWS – and with years of experience in the Texas House of Representatives, including as Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee – I've had the privilege of helping shape our city's long-term water security. From desalination and recycled water reuse to aquifer storage and recovery, these projects ensure our resilience and have earned national recognition for innovation and conservation.

At San Antonio Water System, we take great pride in helping our community use water wisely while keeping our city colorful and beautiful. Even as our population has grown past two million people, per-person water use has dropped dramatically. We have greatly diversified our water supplies and reduced our dependence on the Edwards Aquifer. San Antonio is an extremely water conscious community where we are accustomed to living and landscaping during droughts, proving that efficiency and beauty can coexist.

This Landscape Care Guide, created by our nationally recognized Conservation Department, is designed to help you build and maintain a thriving, water-smart landscape. Whether you're starting from scratch, maintaining an established yard, or looking for ways to save time, money, and of course water, this guide is full of practical, local expertise to help you succeed with ease.

Each plant we choose and each drop we save creates resilience for San Antonio's future. Use this guide year-round for all your landscaping needs and together let's keep our community water secure for generations to come.

Robert R. Puente, President/CEO, San Antonio Water System

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Introduction

Welcome to the SAWS Landscape Care Guide! If you've spent time landscaping in South Central Texas, you probably already know our summers can be hot and dry and we can wait a long time for rain.

With a fast-growing population placing increasing pressure on our available water supplies, it's more important than ever for our landscapes to be drought resilient. On the bright side, our unique setting offers a terrific opportunity to consider home landscaping with a vision reflecting the spirit of San Antonio, placing value on toughness, beauty, creativity and local pride.

Blessed with a very long growing season and living at the junction of four ecoregions, we can select from a wide variety of plant options for our WaterSaver landscapes. If you're looking for low-maintenance perennials, shade trees, and strong native plants that are adapted to conditions in our unique region, then you have come to the right place! By incorporating native and well-adapted plants into your landscape design, you can escape the endless cycle of worrying about turfgrass in summer. We invite you to redesign your landscape with larger garden beds, beautiful outdoor living areas with patios or hardscapes, and a garden style uniquely suited to your aesthetic and the level of maintenance you prefer.

This guide is intended to help you reimagine and care for your outdoor space with a fresh perspective. Think of it as an invitation — to experiment, explore, and discover what a resilient WaterSaver landscape can be. The plant recommendations in this guide are primarily intended for customers of San Antonio Water System but the WaterSaver guidelines apply to anyone interested in creating a drought-tolerant landscape. Following the recommendations in this guide will not only help you develop a beautiful outdoor living space, but it will also help protect our aquifer by conserving our shared water resources. Let's grow something beautiful together!

Mexican bush sage *(Salvia leucantha)*

How to use this guide

The Landscape Care Guide is intended to help you save water while keeping the landscape healthy and well maintained throughout the seasons. Following best practices for the care of your water-saving plants will save you time and money.

Basic principles, including watering and landscape transformation, are covered briefly before you dive into the seasonal care guide.

To everything there is a season … and that's especially true for plants. For beginner gardeners, it can be hard to distinguish between normal seasonal changes ("Is that plant turning brown?") and what might be a real problem ("Is that plant dying?"). Check the Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter sections to review expected tasks to care for your plants and tips to keep your landscape looking its best throughout the year.

This guide pairs with online content via QR codes where you'll find additional information, including links to outside resources. We encourage you to visit **GardenStyleSA.com** to make the most of this guide!

GardenStyleSA.com

Good gardening tip

Plant a Seasonal Star from each season to have blooms year round!

Star jasmine *(Trachelospermum jasminoides)*

Ways to water well

San Antonio's Blue Hole tells the story of water in our part of Texas. The spring only gushes forth in the very wettest years. In dry years, nearly all of the river's Edwards Aquifer spring water has been borrowed by the city it birthed.

Today, half of our local water supplies depend upon the aquifer's steady rise and fall, and the irrigation of our landscapes and crops play a major part in that cycle. The Blue Hole's empty limestone portal, surrounded by a tangle of greenery waiting for the next rain, is a reminder of both the preciousness of water and the resilience of our native landscape.

Most customers in the SAWS service area water by hand, which is the most efficient way to apply water directly to the plants that need it, where they need it most. Watering by hand is the only watering method allowed any day and time during all stages of San Antonio's drought restrictions.

Homes with in-ground irrigation systems can use significantly more water. Irrigation systems can use a lot of water quickly — often due to routine errors in design, maintenance, and overscheduling.

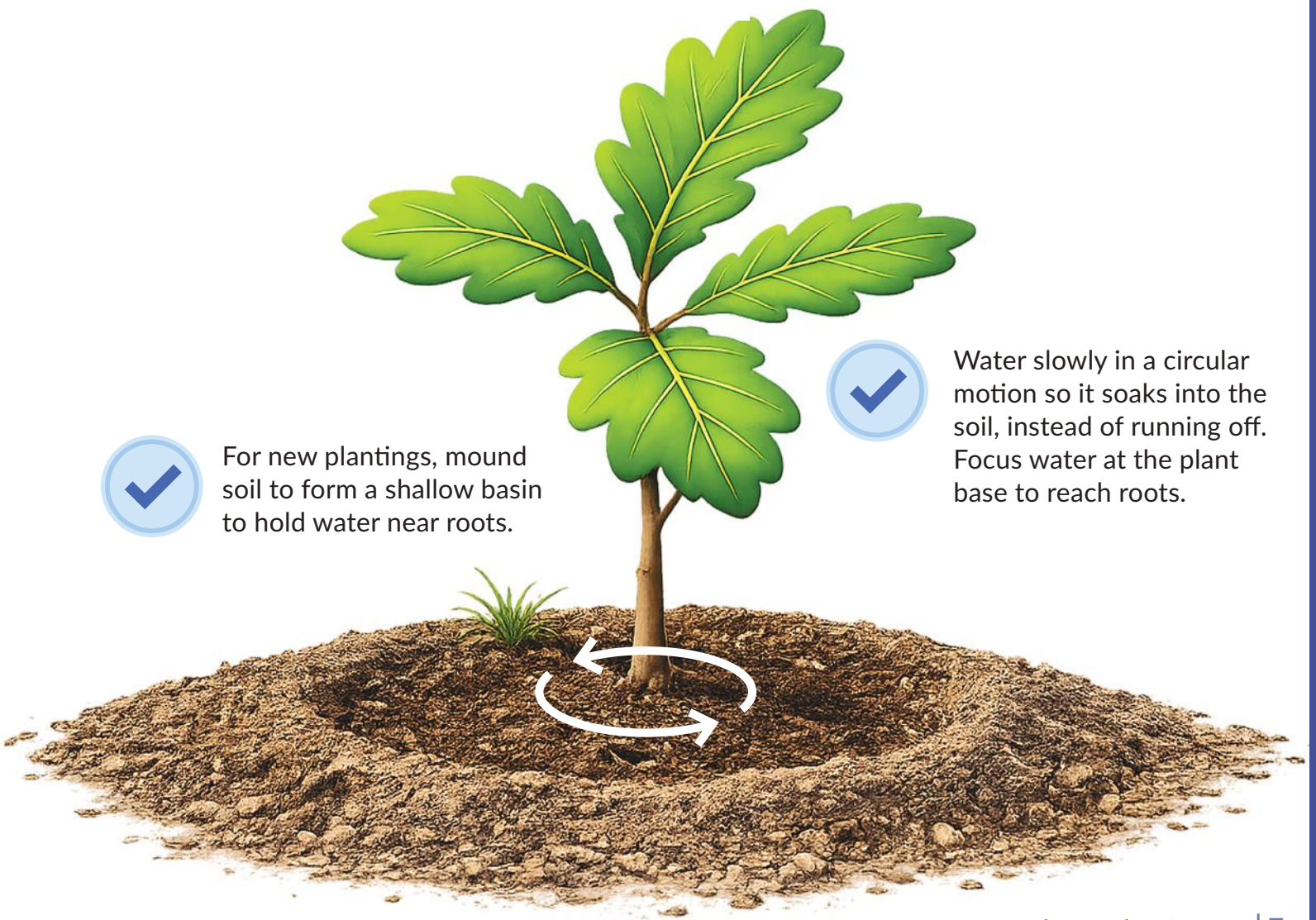
However, efficient and well-designed irrigation makes it possible for us to water the landscape without breaking the bank — if we know how to use our system, how to keep it in good condition, and how to dial it back when necessary. New technology and components are evolving swiftly to keep up with water scarcity. Those with irrigation systems have the responsibility to ensure they are carefully maintained and carefully used — including scaling them back during drought restrictions. The days of "setting and forgetting" a sprinkler system are over in South Central Texas.

Sometimes it seems like using a modern irrigation controller should require a license too. If you've ever found your irrigation running amuck, you'll understand the need for expert help when it comes to managing the controller.

Tips for hand watering

Use a wand or nozzle with a cut off to prevent waste.

Water at dawn or dusk to reduce evaporation.



For new plantings, mound soil to form a shallow basin to hold water near roots.

Water slowly in a circular motion so it soaks into the soil, instead of running off. Focus water at the plant base to reach roots.

Keep irrigation efficient

When it comes to saving water, understanding the basics of your irrigation system is invaluable — and it helps to become very familiar with it before problems arise.

The main components of an irrigation system

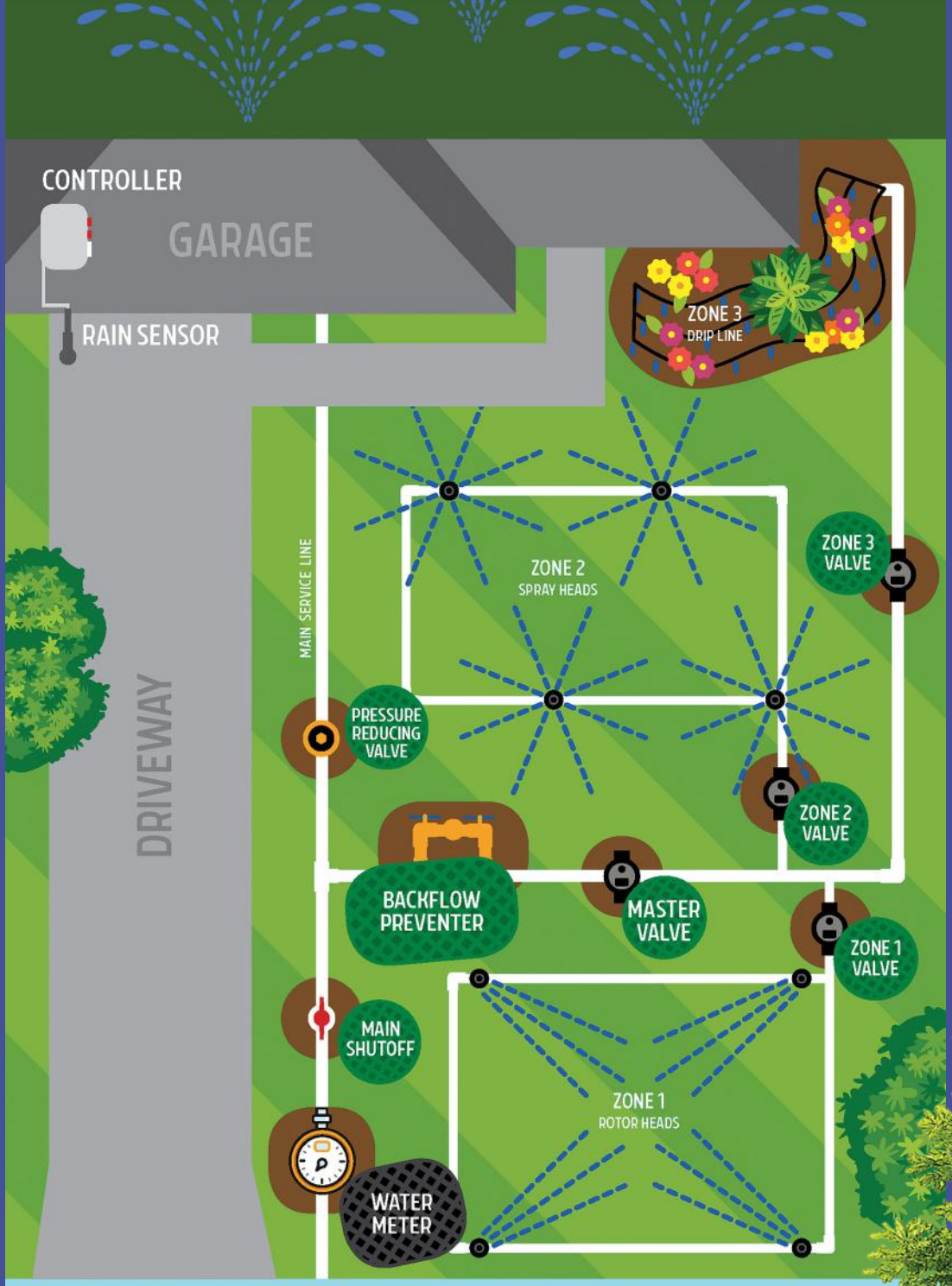
- **Irrigation controller**
  Central hub that sets watering days, times, durations, and conservation features
- **Backflow preventer**
  Stops yard contaminants from entering drinking water
- **Zone (station)**
  A group of matched water emitters that water simultaneously; yards have multiple zones
- **Zone valve**
  A valve wired to controller that opens to water a zone
- **Rain sensor**
  Skips watering when rain is detected; may need periodic replacement. All irrigation systems within San Antonio city limits are required to have a functioning rain sensor and backflow preventer

Per SAWS Utility Service Regulations, irrigation systems may not be designed to water more than a maximum area of 10,000 square feet.

Need help programming your irrigation system?

Schedule a free residential irrigation consultation with a licensed irrigator at 210-704-SAVE (7283).

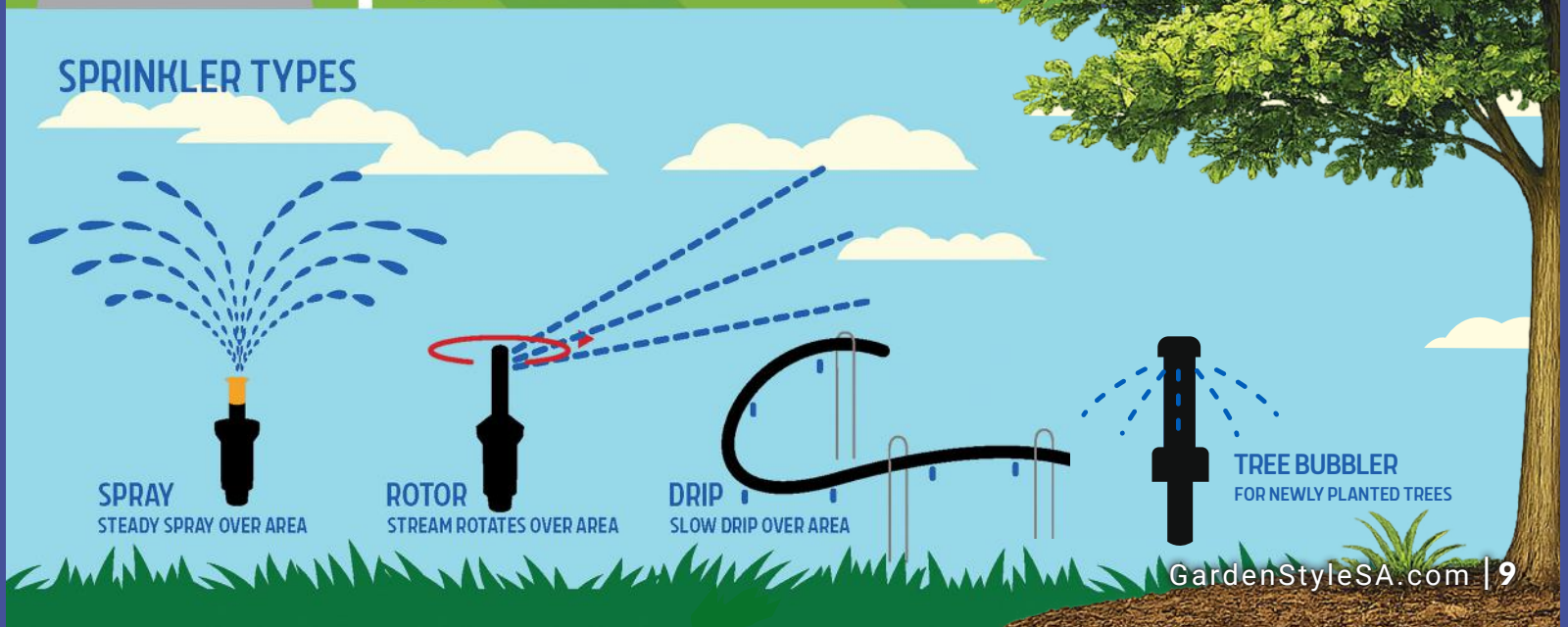
Setting the Irrigation Controller



Did you know?

Texas boasts some of the most rigorous irrigation standards in the U.S. Anyone who designs, installs or maintains irrigation is required to be licensed by TCEQ or be working under the supervision of a licensed irrigator.

Licensed irrigators should have their state license number displayed on their work vehicle. The state does allow homeowners to maintain systems on their own property, allowing for basic repairs of your own system.



Perform a seasonal irrigation walk-through

Conduct a routine irrigation walk-through and record your irrigation controller settings and irrigation zone settings at least twice a year to proactively catch costly issues. Remember to check for the following:

- Broken, leaking or misting sprinkler heads
- Sunken, non-vertical or clogged heads
- Misaligned heads spraying into fences, streets, or driveways
- Disconnected or damaged drip lines
- Underground pipe ruptures

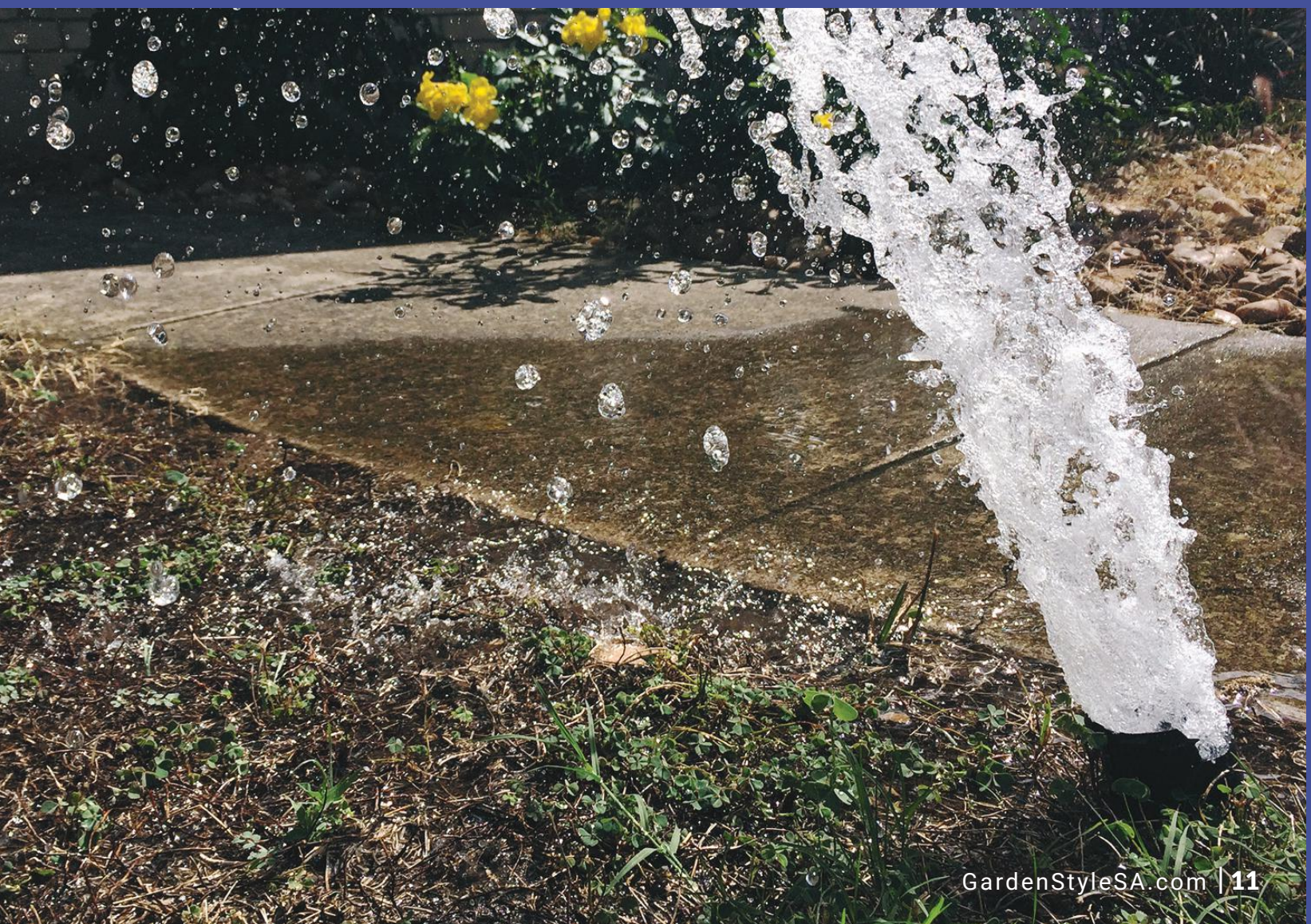
Just like homes, most landscapes and irrigation systems need updates over time. Thinning or struggling turfgrass under mature shade trees likely reflects a changed environment. Grass eventually fades out in deep shade, and no amount of extra watering can revive it to its former lushness. Instead, it's an opportunity to convert to drought-tolerant plants and eliminate irrigation zones that are no longer needed. You may even qualify for cash back through the SAWS Residential Irrigation Rebate program!

Some final reminders

- Irrigation systems are vulnerable to environmental stress. Freezes can burst pipes; dry soils can shift and crack them.
- Routine maintenance is essential to prevent waste and inefficiency.
- Mature landscapes often no longer require irrigation — or may only need it in targeted zones.
- If hiring a professional to evaluate or repair your system, always ask for their TCEQ license number. Licensed irrigators in Texas are trained, tested, and required to complete continuing education to maintain their certification — ensuring they're qualified to assist you.

Over time, an in-ground irrigation system may no longer be worth the cost of repair, especially for established WaterSaver landscapes that no longer need supplemental watering.

SAWS offers irrigation rebates for customers who choose to retire their irrigation system for good! Call 210-704-SAVE (7283) for more details.



Establishing new plants with the 3-2-1 watering method

Perennials

Use the 3-2-1 watering method to establish new perennials over a six-week period and gradually transition them to deeper, more infrequent hand watering. For a one-gallon plant, for example, provide 20 ounces of water (about the size of a soda bottle). If you're using a hose and a spray nozzle, it only takes about six seconds to provide 20 ounces of water.

Always check the soil moisture of your plantings with a finger before applying water. The goal is to keep plants moist, but not wet. During the cool season, the soil may stay moist for much longer and less water may be needed overall — especially for native plants. If your plantings are already saturated, skip one round of watering.

First three weeks — Water three times a week, 20 ounces per watering.

Next two weeks — Water twice a week, 30 ounces per watering.

Final week — Water once per week, 60 ounces per watering.

For native and well-adapted perennials, once you've finished the 3-2-1 establishment period, your plants may need watering no more than once or twice a month. And monthly rainfall means you won't have to water at all!

Trees

For trees, the first two to three summers are a critical period to be attentive to watering. For new trees, the 3-2-1 method for initial establishment can be conducted over a period of three months. For a tree with a caliper (diameter) of up to 1.5 inches, provide 3 gallons of water per week.

First month – Water three times a week, 1 gallon per watering.
Second month – Water twice a week, 1.5 gallons per watering.
Third month — Water once per week, 3 gallons per watering.
For the next six months: Water 2-4 times per month as needed.

Once you get the hang of it, this formula is an easy way to provide consistent light watering by hand while gradually encouraging root growth.

Good gardening tip

When watering new plants, keep soil moist, not soggy. Form a shallow basin to hold water near roots, and mulch to prevent drying. After 6 weeks, water only if leaves wilt or soil is dry a few inches down.

Landscape transformation

You don't need a green thumb to transform your landscape! It's as simple as parting ways with growing water-intensive landscape plants — the most common of which is turfgrass. There was a time, before San Antonio's postwar building boom, when local homeowners limited turfgrass to an area they could reasonably clip with a reel mower, a grass whip, or even scissors! They watered with a hand-held hose or a vintage hose-end sprinkler and were accustomed to the seasonal ups and downs of grass. For touches of green in summer, they planted various hardy perennials and the many shade trees that are still alive today in some of the city's older neighborhoods.

With the invention of gas-powered lawn mowers and in-ground irrigation, it's become easy to use turfgrass as a default groundcover and to use a lot of water to take care of it. WaterSaver landscapes with drought-resilient plants and trees are the new green — and those who've made the switch would never go back to turfgrass!

What is a WaterSaver landscape?

Ideally, a WaterSaver landscape should need little extra water to look its best. Fortunately, many plants can thrive in San Antonio with minimal care. With the right plant selection, WaterSaver landscapes can be shaded or sunny, inviting and lush, and bursting with color during any season of the year.

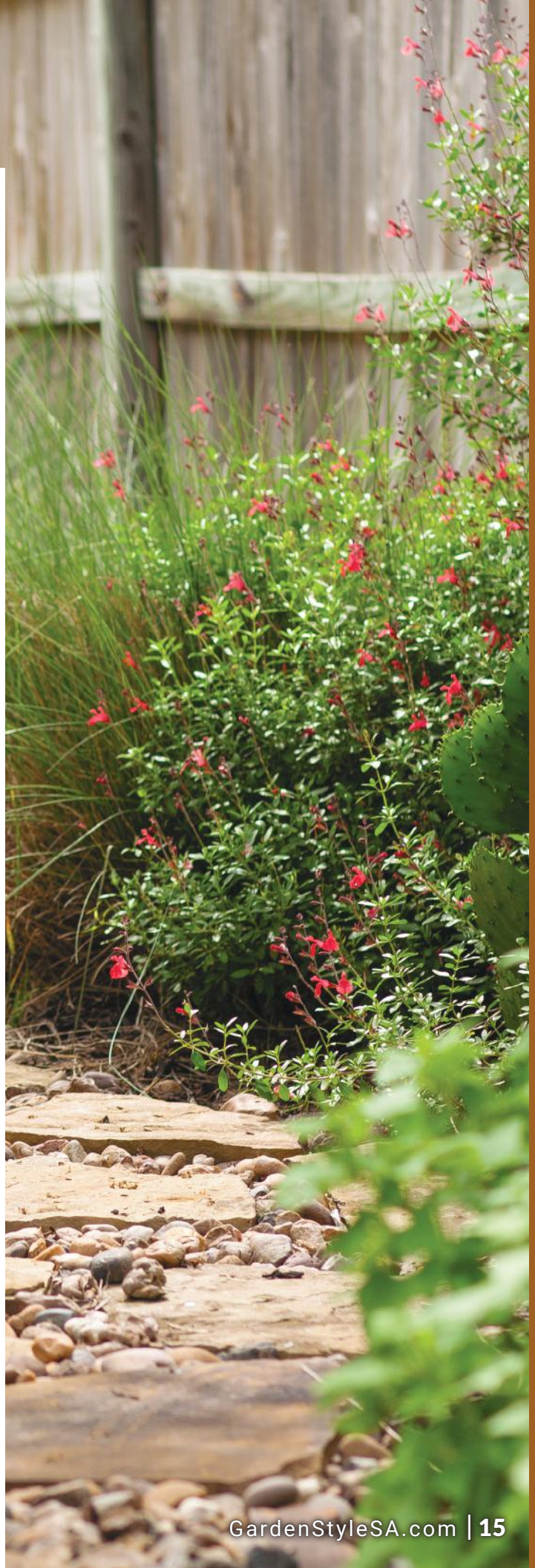
How is a WaterSaver landscape different from a xeriscape?

Xeriscape combines the Greek xero ("dry") with landscape and describes gardening with plants and practices that best match local conditions — either in arid climates or in locations where fresh water is less available. Xeriscape, WaterSaver landscaping, drought-tolerant landscaping and smartscaping are all similar terms used interchangeably. We will use the term WaterSaver throughout this guide, following the usage of this term by San Antonio Water System in conservation programs and the San Antonio Botanical Garden in their public demonstration gardens: the WaterSaver Garden and WaterSaver Community.

How is xeriscape different from zeroscape?

Zeroscape is a somewhat humorous take on "xeriscape" that refers to landscaping without plants or with only rock, cactus and artificial turf — a rather severe choice when we have so many well-suited plant and shade options available! Zeroscaping is not generally recommended as an entire landscape for South Central Texas because it results in a very hot landscape. In addition to looking out of place in many neighborhoods and being restricted by many Texas HOAs, these inorganic materials can end up being labor intensive to maintain, since many local plant and weed species can make themselves perfectly at home in rock, asphalt and even concrete.

To be clear, river rocks, boulders and other rocks can still be incorporated into a healthy WaterSaver garden for aesthetic purposes without resorting to a full zeroscape landscape.



Steps to a WaterSaver landscape

Depending on what you're already growing, how you take care of it, and how you water it, you probably already have portions of a WaterSaver landscape in place. It's easy to find spots with too much turfgrass that needs too much water. And, it's fairly simple to convert these areas to landscape beds, add mulch and learn to water more efficiently. Review the steps below to see where your landscape can be improved. Check the many resources on GardenStyleSA.com for more assistance.

Plan with purpose

Think about what you want from your landscape year round.

- Where do you want to see color or shade — from the windows, the front door, or the street?
- Do you need space for kids, pets, or outdoor entertaining?
- Would you like to attract birds and pollinators, or block unwanted views?

Decide how much maintenance you want to handle yourself. Design for beauty, function, and ease of care.

Know your soil

Test your soil depth and texture. In Bexar County, soil can range from deep and sandy to shallow and rocky.

- Aim for at least of 6 inches of good soil if you're hoping to grow drought-hardy turfgrass.
- Add compost or organic material to improve water retention and soil health.
- For thin soils less than 6 inches deep, native plant beds are an easier option than turf.

Choose the right plants

- Select native or well-adapted plants that thrive with less water.
- Plant and cultivate shade trees for comfort and lower cooling costs.
- Use shrubs, vines or evergreens for privacy and year-round structure.
- Visit **GardenStyleSA.com/plants** for local plant recommendations.

Find a Plant at GardenStyleSA.com

Limit turfgrass

- Limit turfgrass to smaller, defined areas. A good balance is 1/3 outdoor living space, 1/3 landscape beds, and no more than 1/3 turfgrass.
- Even drought-tolerant turf goes dormant (brown) in heat or cold — it's not dead, just resting.

Water wisely

- Once established, your WaterSaver yard needs very little irrigation to look its best.
- Learn how to use your irrigation system — or simplify it.
- Take advantage of SAWS' free irrigation consultation for a customized watering plan — and rebates to help with the cost of new landscaping. Call 210-704-SAVE (7283) to schedule.

Mulch matters

- Apply 2-3 inches of mulch in landscape beds to retain moisture and prevent weeds.
- Avoid piling mulch up against tree trunks.
- Don't exceed 4 inches, which can prevent water from reaching plant roots.

Save on water, save on maintenance

Low-water landscapes need less work, but still some care.

- Prune, weed, and rake as needed. Use leaves as free mulch for landscape beds and mow them to provide a natural source of nitrogen for your lawn.
- Skip the heavy mowing, fertilizing, and resodding that turf often requires. Check GardenStyleSA.com for seasonal maintenance guides and WaterSaver programs.

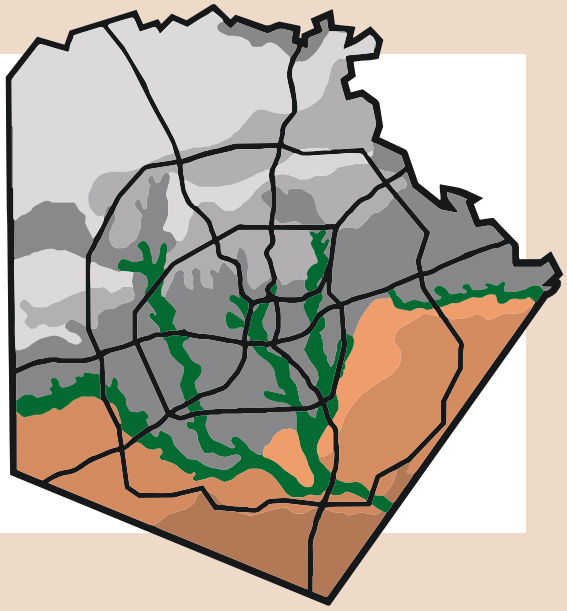
Plant at the right time

- For long-lived landscape plants, fall is the ideal time for new planting — with three seasons of mild weather and seasonal rains ahead to help roots establish before summer heat hits.

Understanding soils

Rough guide to the soils of Bexar County

- Thin clay over limestone
- Moderate clay over limestone
- Deep clay
- Clay and loam on bottomland and terrace
- Deep clay loams over clay
- Deep sandy loams
- Fine sand over loam



- Soil is the living medium in which plant roots grow: a mix of minerals, organic matter, and, counterintuitively, empty space — pores that are full of air and, sometimes, water. A healthy soil may consist of only 48%-60% solid matter, with the rest being empty space.
- The mineral components are segregated based on size from largest to smallest: sand, silt and clay. The relative abundance of different-sized particles defines the character of the soil, with implications for how the soil responds to water and what kinds of plants can thrive in it.
- Soils dominated by the smallest particles are called clays. While clay soils absorb water very slowly, they also have the highest potential to hold onto water and nutrients once they are in place. Clay soils stretch broadly across the central portion of Bexar County from west to east, and along rivers and creeks.
- Soils dominated by the largest particles are called sands. These are not easily compacted, and while they accept water quickly, they retain a smaller portion of it. Sandy soils are found in the extreme southern tip of Bexar County.
- Soils whose particles are evenly balanced between large, medium and small are called loams. Sandy loams can be found in a swath of southern Bexar County.
- "Thin" soils are not a true soil type. The term is used to describe the soils on the far north and west sides of Bexar County where only a few inches of clay soils are underlain by rock.

  In many cases, the native soil has been removed and replaced with a shallow conglomerate of rock, mineral soil, and compost. This is the most challenging local media in which to grow turfgrass. However, it can support many plants native to the southwest and even far west Texas.
- Before you start planning your landscape, it's essential to understand what type of soil you have to work with in your garden. No matter which kind of soil you have, there are benefits and drawbacks to each.
- You can help your soil increase its organic matter by adding compost and mulch. Over time, as beneficial organisms and plants grow, cycle and decay, they will begin to add porosity to the soil and build a healthier medium rich in organic matter — a lasting change.
- In the meantime, the best thing a gardener can do is to accept the soil you're working in and select plants that are well adapted to those conditions.

Getting started

SAWS offers its customers conservation incentives to convert turfgrass to landscape beds and to remove all or portions of irrigation systems. Visit **GardenStyleSA.com** for links to apply for these programs.

Some homeowners add WaterSaver landscape beds as a chance to have bright flowering color in their summer landscape. Others start by converting low-performing grass at the sides of the house, along the driveway, and in shaded corners. And some remove the entire irrigation system and treat the resulting landscape as a completely blank slate, to be populated with native trees and shrubs, perennials, and pollinator gardens.

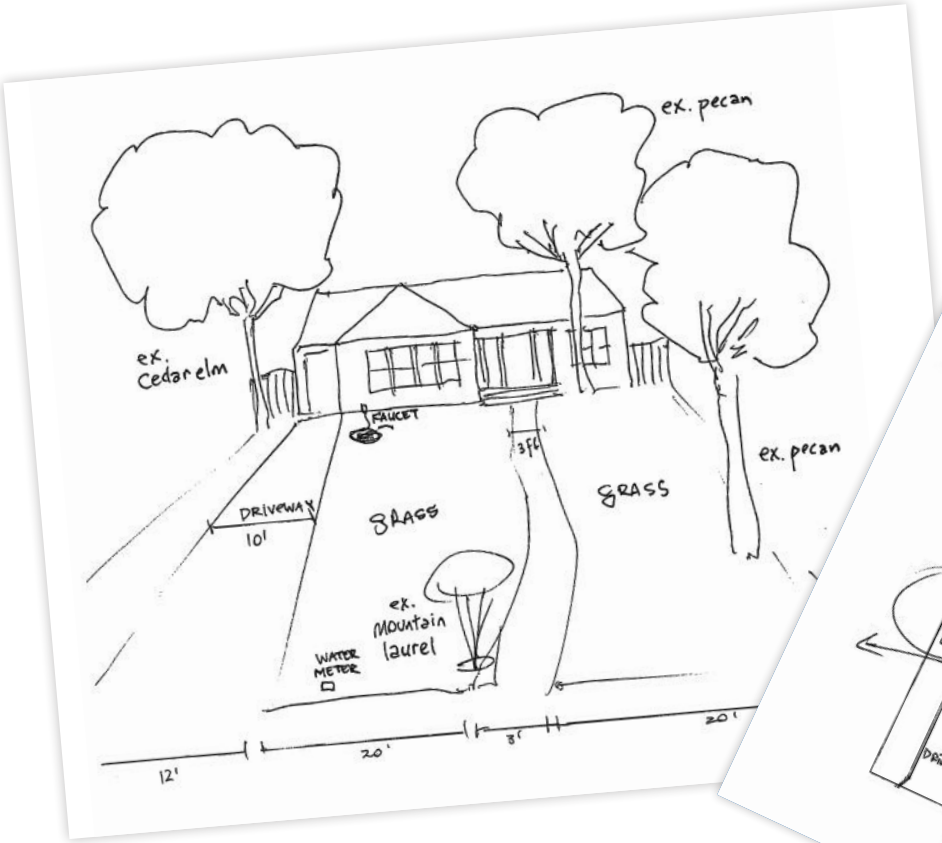
Now it's time to start planning out your own landscape transformation!

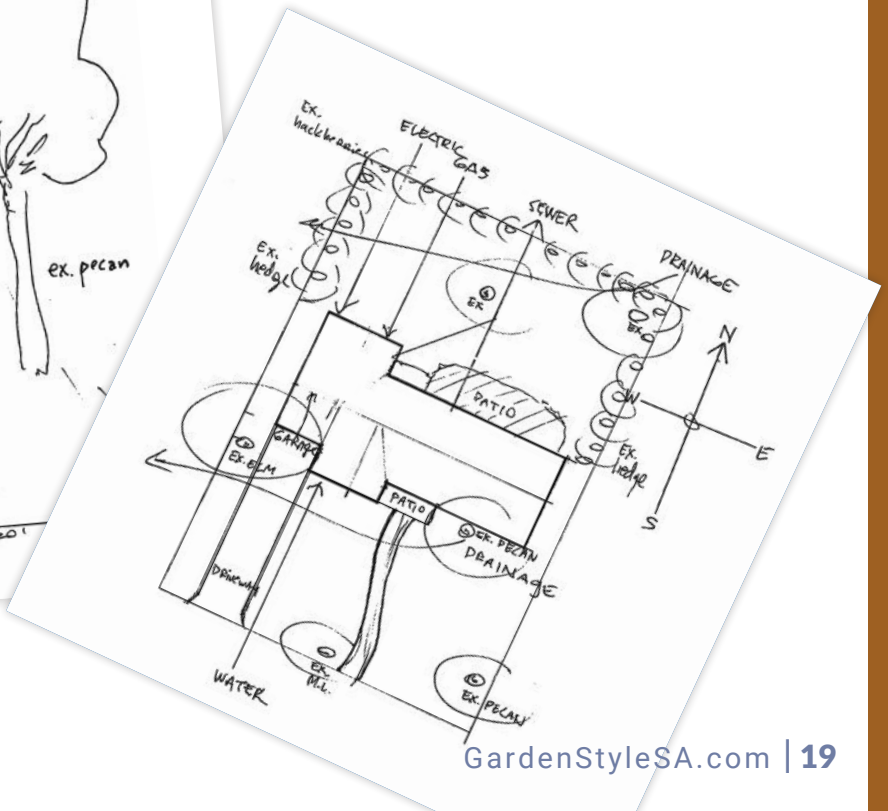
1 Call 811 to have your utility lines marked

Having your utility lines marked helps to prevent damage to utility lines and possible serious injury. Call 811 and visit www.saws.org/locates for more information.

2 Map your landscape

- Sketch your yard (paper, graph paper, or Google Maps).
- Mark property lines, dimensions, and hardscape (buildings, sidewalks, driveways).
- Add vegetation: Draw plant spread and label all trees, shrubs, and flowerbeds.
- Note conditions: slope, drainage, soil, and shade.
- Track sunlight:
  - 8+ hours = full sun (consider shade trees).
  - <3 hours = shade-loving plants.

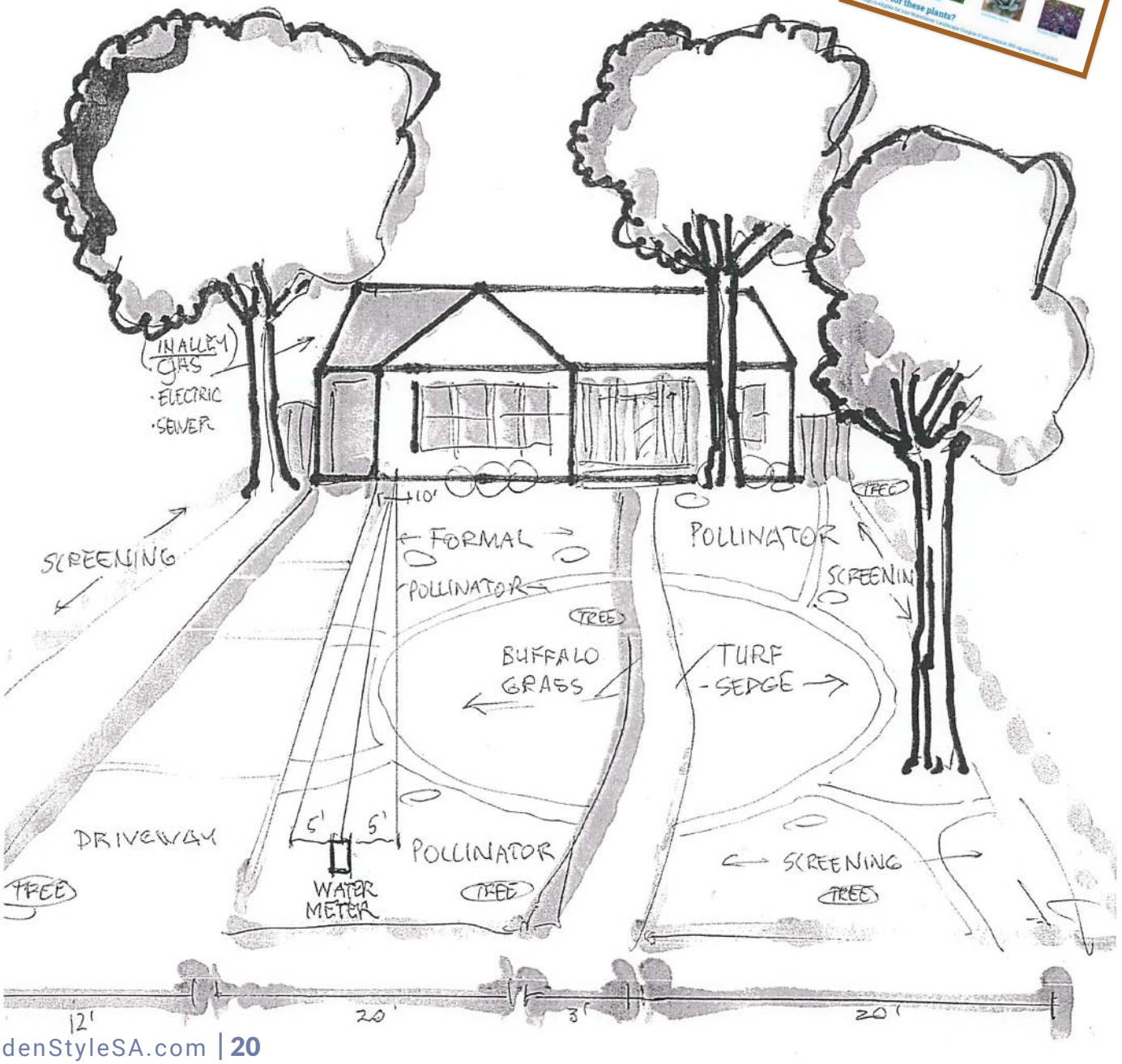




3 Plan your landscape transformation

- Review your goals and how you'll use the space.
- Divide your base map into project areas.
- Note which projects are DIY vs. contractor work.
- Prioritize tasks to plan your time over upcoming seasons.

Plant by Numbers at GardenStyleSA.com



Key design decisions

Trees

Plant where shade is needed — August is the best time to assess where it's most valuable.

Lawns

Decide where turfgrass should remain and reduce its size to match the scope of your outdoor activities. Lawns are the thirstiest part of the yard from July to September, but framing them with landscape plants can minimize water waste and boost curb appeal.

Outdoor living, patios and pathways

Choose locations for patios, outdoor living areas and walkways. Install these later as budget allows, using DIY options like stepping stones or flagstone.

Prioritize landscape beds

Plan and rank the beds you'll install, starting with street fronts or fence lines. SAWS designs are based around 200 square foot sections (about a parking space), which can be combined into borders that frame the entire yard.

Choose a plant palette

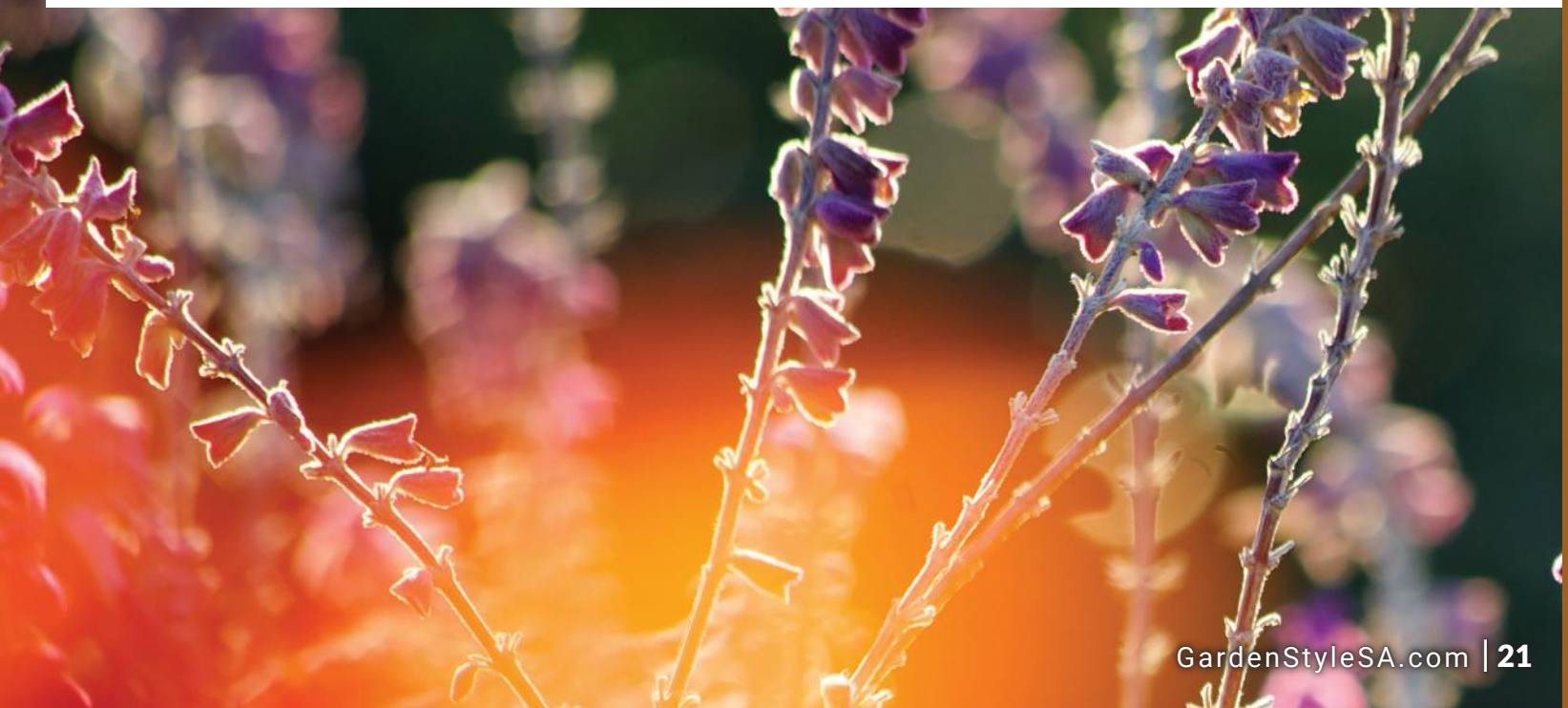
For many beginner gardeners, this is the fun part, and you'll definitely want to start making a list. Keep in mind that you may need to consider alternative plant choices depending on the availability of certain plants at local nurseries.

Irrigation consultations and rebates

If you want to save water in the landscape, it's not enough to just change out the plants. If you have in-ground irrigation, contact SAWS Conservation for an assessment of your system. Your consultant can make sure it's running efficiently, suggest improvements, and share available rebate options if you're ready to make changes or retire it!

Landscape changes that don't consider changes to the irrigation system may miss the opportunity to achieve real water savings

Now you can start officially designing your new landscape. On your base map, sketch in the locations of your planned landscape beds, outdoor living areas, and smaller turfgrass areas. Once you have it sketched out, you can begin picking plants. Considering the environmental conditions noted on your base map, use the "Find A Plant" database on **GardenStyleSA.com** to select plants matching your environmental criteria.



4 Eliminate the turfgrass and improve soil

Outline your first garden bed with a hose and mark edges with flags or paint, watching for utility lines. To remove grass, choose from five recommended methods:

Physical removal

Use a garden spade or flat-blade shovel to cut and lift turfgrass cleanly. St. Augustine grass is especially easy to remove with this method.

Sheet mulching

Scalp grass with a trimmer or mower, then cover with cardboard, compost, and mulch. You can plant immediately, but fully killing Bermuda grass may take up to six months unless it is also treated with herbicide.

Herbicide

Apply non-selective herbicide for grass and weeds, or selective for grass only. Follow label directions, avoid the area until safe, and don't spray on windy days to protect nearby plants. It may require more than one application to kill persistent grasses like Bermuda grass.

Machine removal

Rent a sod cutter to cleanly lift sod without chemicals. It creates a flat surface and is ideal for laying out walkways or large garden beds.

Solarization

Cover grass with clear plastic for 6+ weeks in summer sun to overheat and kill it. This method is effective but slow.

Once the treated area is ready for planting, rake out any large rocks, sticks and roots.

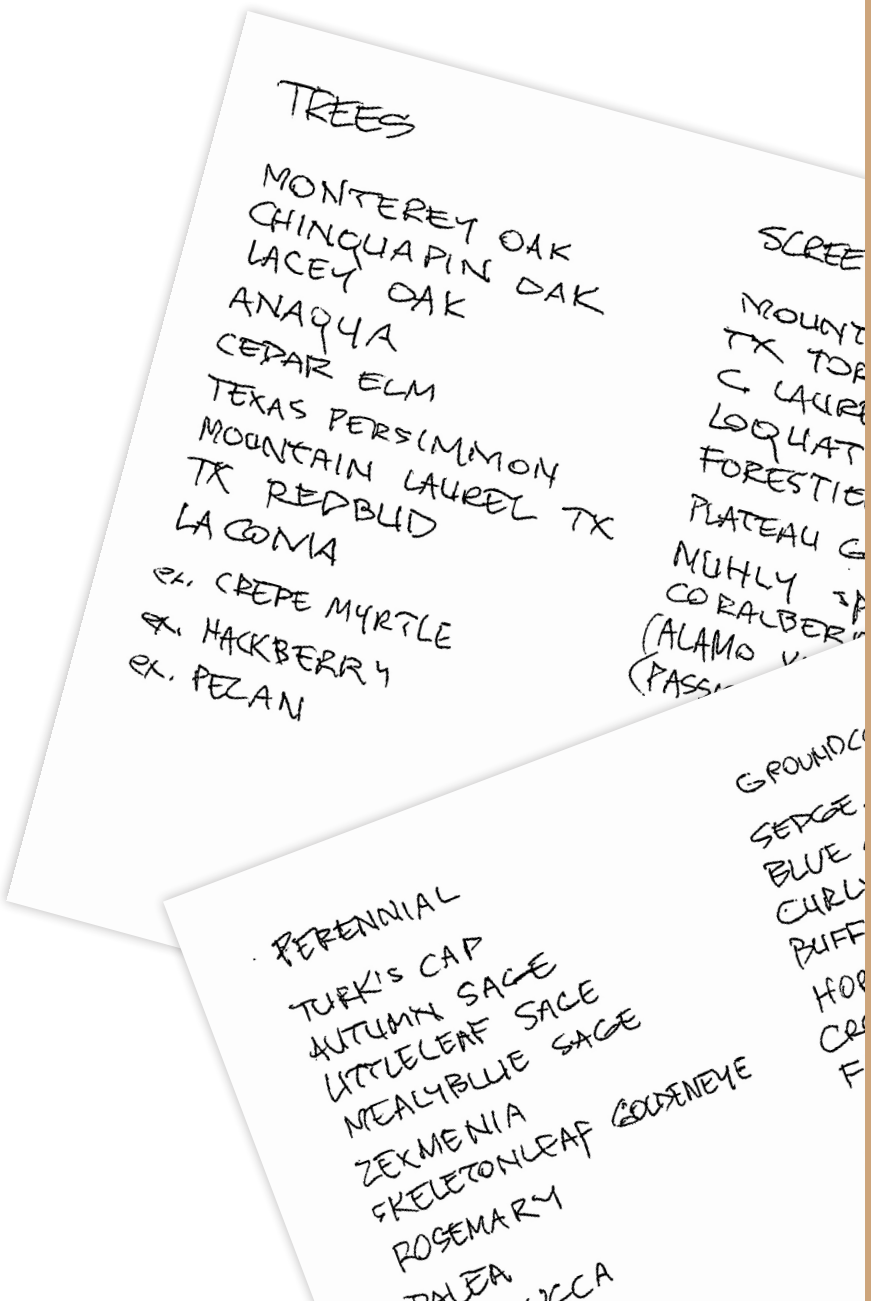
After: Mix in compost

- Add 2–3 inches of compost and blend into the top 8–12 inches of soil.
- For clay soil: mix in shredded bark or other fibrous material.
- For sandy soil: add aged manure and coconut coir to hold moisture.

Preparing for sheet mulching with cardboard

5 Plant selection

- Match plants to your site's conditions — sun, soil, water, and climate zone.
- Read plant tags or research online for details like mature size and care needs.
- Prioritize native plants; they're well adapted and need less maintenance.
- Plan for succession by mixing plants that bloom at different times for color during all seasons.
- Arrange by height, placing taller plants in the back or center and shorter ones up front to ensure sunlight reaches all.



Did you know?

Not all plants used in local landscapes are Texas natives — a few may be well adapted favorites that fulfill specific design purposes. But plants that are too well-adapted can become invasive, spreading out of control, outcompeting others for existing water and space, and damaging the local ecosystem.

By choosing to use resilient Texas native plants in your own landscape, you help conserve water and celebrate the unique heritage of our corner of Texas — its style, its plants, and its wildlife community. At the junction of four ecoregions, Bexar County residents can choose from an extraordinarily wide selection of native plants to meet almost any aesthetic need, from edible to evergreen to ornamental. Once established, native plants will need less water, less fertilizer, and less herbicide — it just makes sense.

Find a Plant at GardenStyleSA.com

6 Plant your garden

- Lay out plants in their containers first to finalize placement — smaller plants in front, larger ones or trees in back.
- Dig a hole the same depth as the root ball and about twice as wide.
- After removing the plant from its container, loosen roots on root-bound plants so they can spread outward.
- Backfill with native soil mixed with compost, tamp gently to remove air pockets, and top with 3 inches of hardwood mulch.
- Water thoroughly right after planting, following the 3-2-1 rule for establishment.
- Continue watering as needed: about six weeks for perennials. Trees take up to six months to establish and may need additional water over the first 2-3 summers.

Once you've gotten the hang of adding your first landscape bed, the same formula can be repeated whenever you add new landscape beds. Many homeowners continue to work along the fence lines or property lines, extending the mixed border until all their grass lawn areas are perfectly framed on all sides. It's a very simple plan for achieving a full landscape transformation.

Try these design tips for a striking landscape:

Plan ahead

Lay out hoses to shape new landscape beds. A classic formal design: Encircle your front lawn and driveway on all sides with landscaping beds. If you're working the backyard, use the fences as a guide. For the biggest water savings, supersize the beds — wide enough to accommodate small trees.

Plant in odd numbers

Group 3, 5, or 7 of the same plant for natural rhythm and texture. Odd-number groupings are more visually pleasing than pairs.

Mix spikes and mounds

Balance spiky plants like muhly grass, yucca, or nolina with rounded perennials such as Texas lantana or salvia for contrast and drought-tolerant variety.

Layer your landscape

Combine tall trees, medium shrubs, and low groundcovers to create depth, privacy, and wildlife habitat. Place taller plants in the back and shorter ones in front.

Add a backbone

Evergreens and architectural plants (like agave, palms, or bunchgrass) provide structure and interest year round — even when seasonal plants go dormant.

Use curves, not lines

Curved bed edges soften the look of your yard and draw the eye to focal points, while straight lines can feel harsh and flat.

Define lawns with paths

Use flagstones, stepping stones, or pavers to clearly separate turfgrass from planting areas and make mowing easier.

Supersize your beds

Larger mulched beds with smaller turfgrass areas reduce water use and maintenance while giving your yard a polished, intentional look.

Managing expectations

Re-landscaping requires upfront effort, but the payoff grows over time. Most plants need about three years to fully establish — often summed up as “sleep, creep, then leap.”

Sleep (first year)

Plants focus on root development underground, so visible growth may seem slow. This is when new plants rely most on your care, especially consistent watering through their first summer.

Creep (second year)

Growth becomes more noticeable as plants gain strength and fill in. This is a good year to evaluate what’s performing well and what might need to be switched out in the next phase of your project.

Leap (third year)

Plants take off, thriving with far less supplemental water. At this stage, your role shifts to light maintenance: occasional pruning, shaping, and enjoying the vibrant life your landscape now supports.

Gardening in San Antonio means working with what you can’t control — soil and climate. Some plants won’t make it, and that’s normal. Gardening here is trial and error, even for experts.

Master Gardeners often joke, “You never really know a plant until you’ve killed it three times.” Each loss teaches you what works and what doesn’t. Over time, you’ll learn to use the harsh summers and pleasant cool seasons to your advantage — and there’s always a new project to get started.

Best practices for pests and other problems

Despite your best efforts, pests, diseases, and other problems will find their way into your home landscape. Visit the Garden Problem Solver at GardenStyleSanAntonio.com for tips on identifying, preventing and managing commonly encountered landscape challenges, from insect infestations to deer. It also addresses a few problems associated with home lawns, trees, and wildlife.

Garden Problem Solver

The easy gardening style: integrated pest management

All of our recommendations follow Integrated Pest Management (IPM), a science-based strategy utilizing a variety of environmentally sustainable techniques. This starts with good gardening practices, cultural methods, and tough plant selection to prevent routine landscape issues from becoming more serious. The goal is not to completely eliminate every insect (many are beneficial), but to strengthen the landscape so conditions are more favorable for your plants than for pests.

Integrated pest management may sound technical, but actually, it is the easiest approach to landscape challenges. Homeowners with little spare time prefer IPM, because it requires less effort and less exposure to potentially hazardous chemicals for pets and family.

Watch your garden

Keep an eye on the landscape and take note of changes and insects as they appear. If you notice a problem early, the less toxic solutions are more likely to easily solve a problem.

Monarch larva on milkweed

Identify problems

Make sure you know what you are treating and if treatment is necessary. Consult the Bexar County Texas Agrilife Extension for help in identifying pests and diseases.

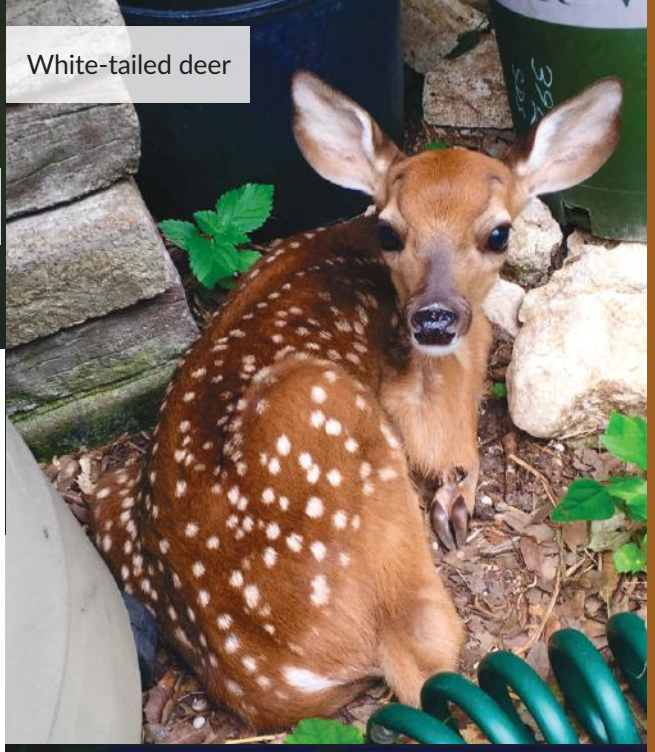
Managing problems may include accepting that, at certain times of the year, a plant may not look its best. It could also mean deciding to replace a plant best suited for acidic soils with a better-adapted option that will perform better in local soil types.

If other strategies fail and you decide to use a chemical treatment option, keep the following in mind:

- Use the least toxic solutions first. Insecticides will destroy beneficial insects as well as the problem pests. This disrupts the natural balance of predator insects and pest prey insects, and can leave plants more vulnerable to infestations in the future.
- Read all label instructions carefully. Apply only to the plants specified and only for the problems indicated at the recommended dosage. Incorrect applications can cause more problems than they solve and can be dangerous.
- Follow instructions on the best conditions and time of day for application. Wind, rain, and temperature can lower the effectiveness of your application.
- Read all warnings to determine if a product is dangerous to pets or unsuitable for vegetable crops. If you're in doubt about how to use a particular product or wondering if you should even be using it in the first place, contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Garden Problem Solver

Aphids



White-tailed deer

In IPM, most problems can be remedied using the following techniques:

Tough plant selection

As seen in this guide and at **GardenStyleSA.com**, tough plants can survive in our climate with minimal care. Using a diversity of native plants and trees can help prevent the spread of infestations and disease, especially when compared to landscapes dominated by turfgrass and just a few plant types.

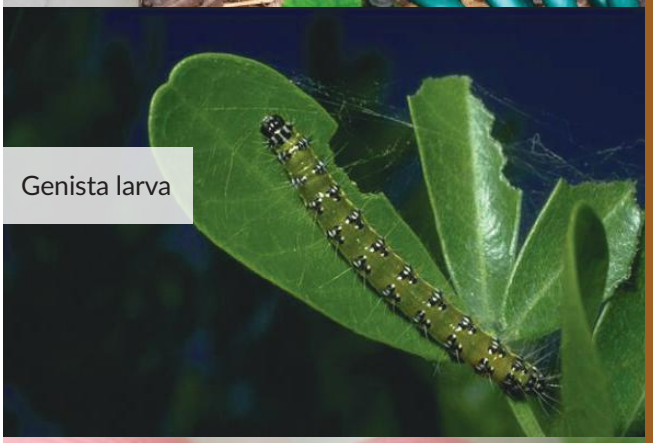
Good gardening practices

Refreshing mulch and compost can make your landscape plants stronger and reduce weed competition. Other practices, such as watering in the morning instead of the evening, can prevent fungal problems.

Biological controls involve beneficial predatory or parasitic insects to control insect pests. Ladybugs are good examples: they can naturally find and attack pests like aphids and diminish their populations. In some cases, it's possible to speed up the process by purchasing beneficial insects and releasing them into home gardens.

Mechanical controls are simple measures that discourage pests. For example, a strong spray of water directed on the underside of leaves disrupts spider mites and mealybugs that are feeding on plants.

Chemical controls, while not the first line of defense, are utilized in IPM to quickly reduce a pest population (plant or insect) that is out of control and cannot be reduced quickly enough by other methods.



Genista larva

Ladybug larvae with aphids

White grubs

Spring

Mid-February - April

San Antonio's coldest month of the year is February, but it also marks the unofficial start of spring in South Central Texas. By Valentine's Day, the pruning season kicks off with roses, and once it begins to warm up in March, most other perennials can be pruned as well. When trees begin to leaf out in April and spring bloom is universal, wildflowers paint the roadsides and landscapes are bursting with green growth. Keep in mind that summer perennials and turfgrass won't hit their prime until the ground warms up, and excess water or fertilizer won't speed up the process. Spring is a season whose fleeting pleasures and abundant color can be enjoyed without supplemental water as we prepare our landscapes for summer.

Spring seasonal stars

Consider planting a "seasonal star" from each season in this guide to have a focal piece for every season.

Anacacho orchid tree *(Bauhinia lunarioides)*

Texas redbud

Cercis Canadensis

Small tree

Redbuds are fast-growing trees that erupt in a profusion of pink blooms before the leaves arrive on most other trees.

Texas mountain laurel

Dermatophyllum secundiflorum

Small tree

Texas mountain laurel is prized for its glossy evergreen leaves and its ability to survive drought, pests and heat. Larger specimens are laden with clusters of grape-scented purple blooms. Note, the red beans contain poison.

Mealy blue sage
Salvia farinacea

Perennial

This easy-going Central Texas salvia has parented a multitude of cultivars, most of them in stunning bloom in the second half of spring. The "mealy" English and botanical names refer to flour, or meal, alluding to the pale dusting of felt-like hairs around its flowers.

Rose
Rosa spp

Perennial shrub

There's something timeless about the flowers and fragrance of roses, and their effortless display is a delight in spring. They are a diverse bunch of plants. Old-fashioned and Earth-Kind® rose varieties can survive and bloom in native soils with minimal irrigation, pesticides, or pruning.

Red yucca
Hesperaloe parvifolia

Succulent

Red yucca is a thornless architectural evergreen with fleshy leaves that store water. It blooms profusely from spring to summer, making it a stalwart in the hummingbird garden.

Zexmenia
Wedelia hispida

Perennial

Zexmenia is a small spreading shrub with dusty gray-green foliage and small yellow daisies from spring to frost. It thrives in poor soil, has high heat tolerance, and is the larval host for checkerspot butterflies.

Spring checklist

February

New plantings

- [ ] Complete planting of new perennials (February–April).

Groundcovers

- [ ] Trim back Asiatic jasmine.

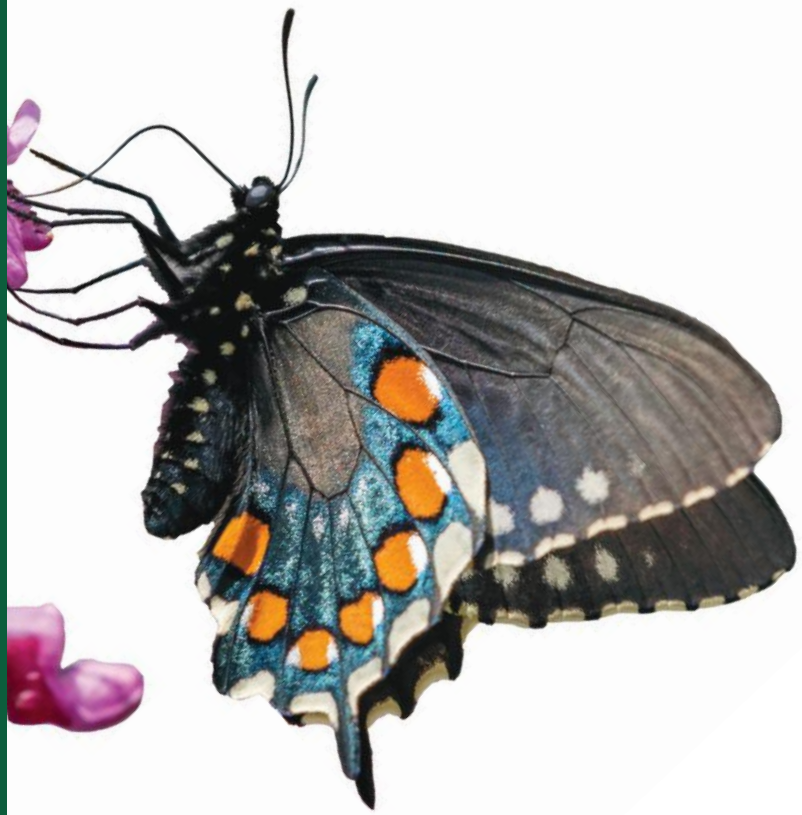
Roses

- [ ] Begin annual pruning of most roses around mid-February (through mid-March). Climbing roses should be pruned after their spring bloom.

Trees

- [ ] Complete pruning of shade trees (February–March).

To prevent oak wilt, DO NOT prune oaks after January — disease-spreading beetles are active.



March

New plantings

- [ ] Hand water new plantings and trees using the 3-2-1 method.

Turfgrass

- [ ] Apply compost to improve soil and moisture retention (March–May).

Bunchgrasses

- [ ] Rake through muhly grass to remove dead leaves and refresh; can be cut back by half every three years.

Perennials

- [ ] Cut freeze-damaged perennials back by 1/3 or to new green growth. Leave an aboveground crown to mark the location of the plant.

Roses

- [ ] Finish annual pruning of climbing and old-fashioned roses.

Succulents

- [ ] Remove dead or freeze-damaged agave leaves (March–April).

Backbone plants

- [ ] Clean-up and prune as needed to control size.

Trees

- [ ] Complete pruning shade trees before they re-leaf; do NOT prune oaks.

April

New plantings

- [ ] Complete planting of new perennials by late April to get them established before summer.

Irrigation

- [ ] Complete a checkup of your system; check controller; replace battery. Test and activate rain sensor; replace if needed.

Landscape beds

- [ ] Apply up to 2 inches of compost.

Annuals

- [ ] Remove spent cool-season annuals.
- [ ] Prepare landscape beds before planting annuals: amend the soil with 3-4 inches of organic compost and mix it in thoroughly.

Perennials and backbone plants

- [ ] Finish spring pruning and mulching before mid-May.

May

New plantings

- [ ] Hand water new plantings to establish before summer.

Trees

- [ ] Prune spring-flowering ornamental trees such as redbud, Texas mountain laurel, and Mexican plum.

Turfgrass

- [ ] Begin weekly mowing, if you haven't already.

Perennials

- [ ] Apply mulch around individual plants and in landscape beds.

Weeds

- [ ] For landscape beds, remove young weeds by hand, or use a soil knife or scuffle hoe.

Irrigation

- [ ] Keep your automatic sprinkler system in the "off" or "manual" mode and run it only if your soil is drying, or when established plants show slight wilting in the morning hours.

Spring seasonal tips

Perennials

After the last freeze

San Antonio's last freezes usually occur by mid-March. If perennial stems were damaged, cut them back to fresh green growth after mid-March.

Spring planting

Early April is prime time for planting new, well-adapted perennials. Finish by May so they have time to establish before the summer heat.

Mulch refresh

Renew mulch in planted areas to a depth of 2 inches. For new trees, gently mounding mulch up to form a slight basin can in aid watering.

Feed your perennials

Every two to three years, top dress landscape beds with up to 2 inches of compost in spring.

Roses

Around Valentine's Day, rose buds begin to swell. For repeat-blooming roses, prune in mid-February to build a strong framework for new growth.

For climbing roses, wait until after the spring bloom — usually late April — before major pruning.

Turfgrass

Hold off on watering

Don't irrigate in early spring! Warm-season grasses don't need water until soil temps reach 65–70°F (usually April–May). Early watering only helps weeds.

Know your weeds

Winter grasses like rescue grass and ryegrass peak in March–April, then die back naturally. Don't water them, just mow them — they'll be replaced by warm-season turf.

Wait to fertilize

Don't fertilize unless your lawn is actively growing. For Bermuda, St. Augustine, and Zoysia, that's mid-April — after you've mowed twice. Fertilizing too soon just feeds weeds, and it may runoff into area streams.

In March and early April, only slow-release or organic fertilizer should be used.

Trees

Protect oaks

Do not prune after February 1—oak wilt risk is high in spring, especially for live oaks and red oaks.

If wounds occur, paint them within 30 minutes to prevent infection.

Missed winter pruning? Try again in mid-summer, when beetles are less active.

Plant early

Finish planting new trees by end of February so they can handle their first Texas summer.

Mulch for health

Apply 2 inches of mulch under the canopy in early April to keep roots cool and retain moisture.

Oak wilt "fishbone" pattern in live oak leaf

Annuals

Add spring color

As soils warm, plant hardy warm-season annuals to fill bare spots in garden beds.

Prep before planting

Annual beds should be amended with up to 3 inches of organic compost mixed into native soil.

If heavy bed prep is not to your taste, use a few long-blooming annuals and perennials in pots instead.

Timing

Plant annuals after the last frost and before the May heat sets in.

Watering

Transplanted annuals dry out fast — water daily until established. Keep soil moist, not soggy, to prevent root rot or fungus.

Maintenance

Once rooted, most annuals only need watering about once a week, depending on the species.

If you have wildflowers you'd like to return next year, allow them to go to seed before cutting back.

Heartleaf hibiscus
(*Hibiscus martianus*)

Backbone plants

Technique

Prune evergreen shrubs after the last freeze and before more than a foot of new growth appears.

Technique

Hand prune for a natural, healthy shape.

Formal hedges

Shear with hedge trimmers only for a tidy look — too much shearing can block light and stress the plant.

Texas dandelion
(*Pyrrhopappus carolinianus*)

Weed control

Tackle early

Winter weeds peak in spring after growing all winter. Start hand pulling early before they go to seed.

Mow or trim

Keep turfgrass areas neat to stop weeds from spreading seeds.

Get the root out

After a spring rain, remove young weeds by the root while the soil is moist.

Use the right tools

Hand tools: pullers or soil knives for deep-rooted weeds.

Stand-up tools: scuffle hoes or grass whips if you prefer to stay upright.

For major problems:

Consider a pre-emergent herbicide next year.

Apply August 15–September 15, or mid-September–early October for corn gluten.

Apply products before weeds germinate; products last about 100 days and may need reapplication depending on weather.

Agarita (*Berberis trifoliolata*)

Mulch: The key to a healthier garden

Why mulch

Mulch is a lifesaver for Texas landscapes — literally. It shields bare ground from the summer sun, keeps soil cooler, protects roots, retains moisture, and reduces weed competition. As it breaks down, it builds healthy soil and gives beds a tidy, finished look.

Good gardening tip

Organic mulch
(hardwood chips, pecan shells, pine needles, straw, or leaves)

- Holds moisture
- Keeps roots cool
- Improves soil as it breaks down

Inorganic mulch
(Decomposed granite, river rock, or gravel)

- Great for walkways and accents
- Doesn't enrich the soil

Materials

For centuries, mulch came from fallen leaves, straw, or crop residue like pecan shells. Today, it's often sourced from shredded bark or hardwood, though inorganic options like rock, decomposed granite, or recycled rubber are also used. Organic mulch provides the best benefits, improving soil biodiversity and encouraging helpful organisms like bacteria, fungi, and earthworms.

Depth

Mulch trees and beds in spring at a depth of 2-4 inches. More than four inches can block water. Check existing mulch depth before adding more; it's not always needed each season.

Tree care

Avoid piling mulch against tree trunks — it can cause rot. Keep mulch away from trunks and leave the root flare exposed.

Good gardening tip Keep mulch 2 inches deep and away from tree trunks — think donut, not volcano.

Compost: The ultimate soil amendment

If you're looking for the ultimate all-purpose organic fertilizer to apply to your spring landscape, many experts swear by compost — plant and animal matter being decomposed by hardworking microbes, bacteria and fungi. When you apply the finished product as a top dressing to your own garden beds or turfgrass, those microbes and living processes are transferred into your own soil and that's where the magic happens.

What it does

- Compost is the stuff of life. It improves soil structure, moisture retention, and nutrient flow; it reduces compaction in clay and improves water retention in sandy soil.

How to apply

- Spread over lawns or garden beds with a shovel or wheelbarrow.
- Use .5 inch for topdressing lawns, up to 2 inches for existing beds, and 3 inches mixed into the topsoil for new beds.
- Smooth evenly with a rake; it will blend in within a week.

When to apply

- Best in spring and fall.
- Avoid heavy composting after mid-May, as mature compost gives off heat not needed in summer.

Should I be using fertilizer?

Local soil types usually have plenty of phosphorous and potassium, but they may lack nitrogen. You can usually make up the nitrogen deficit by mowing grass and fallen leaves often and leaving the clippings on the lawn. Adding a layer of compost will usually take care of the rest.

Synthetic fertilizers, by contrast, tend to be overused in the home landscape — especially in spring when many plants and lawns are still dormant.

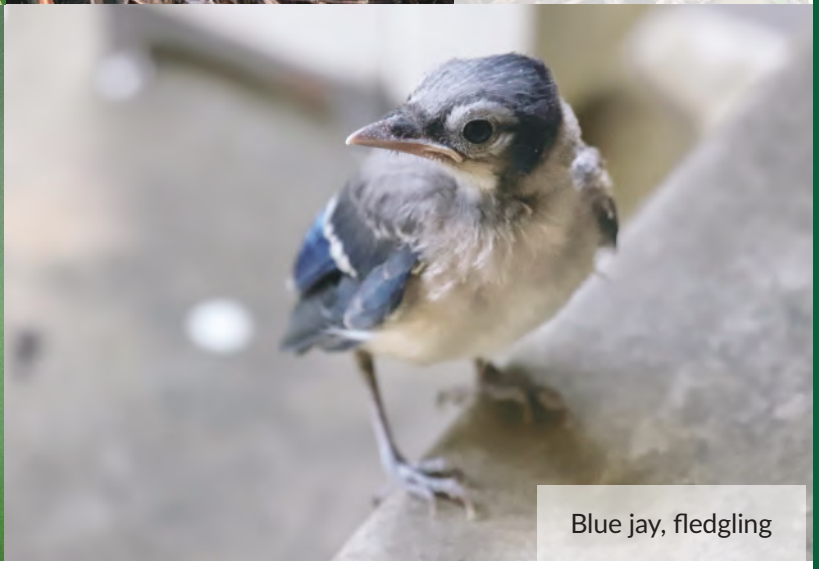
- Synthetic fertilizers provide various combinations of nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P), potassium (K), and sometimes sulfur (S). 19-5-9 and 3-1-2 are formulations typically used for local soils.
- They can provide plants with a short-lived nutrient boost but may exhaust soils and kill off beneficial microorganisms. They can also burn plants and add to salt buildup.
- "Weed and feed" fertilizers are not designed for the year-round growing conditions in the San Antonio area.
- When applied in March and early April, before plants are actively growing, synthetic fertilizers can run off your lawn and pollute groundwater and rivers.

A variety of organic slow-release fertilizers are now available commercially to address specific plant needs. These can be much better for your soil in the long term.

Black-chinned hummingbird, nesting

Long billed thrasher, hatchling

Yellow warbler, migrating



Blue jay, fledgling

The wildscape in spring

You may not appreciate caterpillars on your plants, but nesting birds do!

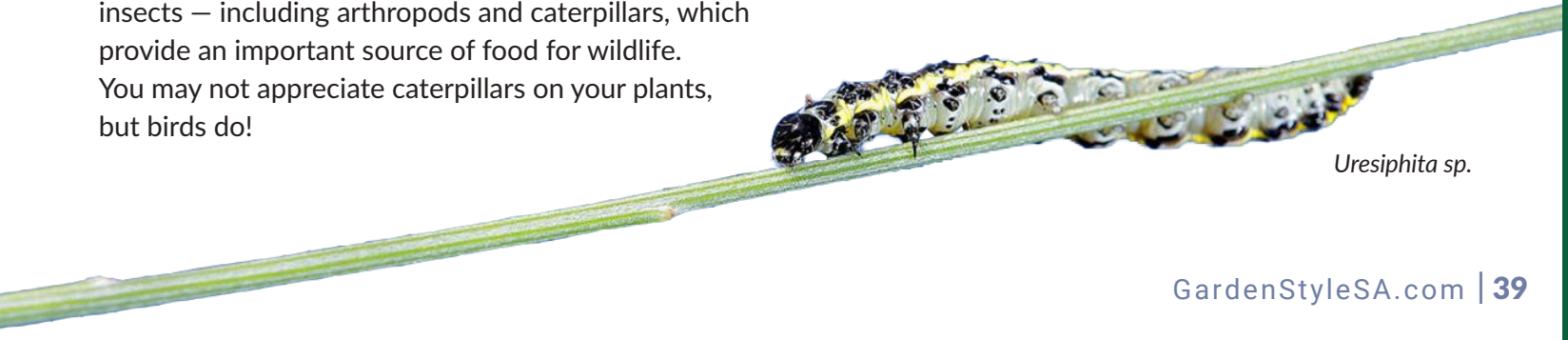
Springtime in Texas can be sublime with its eye-widening wildflower displays, buzzing bees, and the delightful parade of migratory birds.

Your landscape design and plant selections can make a difference for migrating and resident birds as well as other wildlife.

Compared to plants that have been introduced to the local ecosystem, native plants typically host the most insects — including arthropods and caterpillars, which provide an important source of food for wildlife. You may not appreciate caterpillars on your plants, but birds do!

Leaving seedheads can help migrating birds too. Whether it's spring wildflowers or summer sunflowers and grasses, all seeds provide a major source of dining for doves, goldfinches, and even painted buntings.

Look at ways to increase the size of your landscape beds. An easy way to support wildlife is to simply enlarge your existing landscape beds and add trees.



Uresiphita sp.

Crape myrtle *(Lagerstroemia indica)*

Summer

May-September

Summer is San Antonio's signature season — the one we prepare for all year. Turfgrass often fades to brown by July and August, but hardy, heat-tolerant perennials can keep their color and thrive without extra watering. Enjoy the easy blooms of your WaterSaver landscape from the shade of a tree or patio umbrella.

Summer seasonal stars

Consider planting a "seasonal star" from each season in this guide to have a focal piece for every season.

Plumbago

Plumbago auriculata

Perennial

Plumbago is an easygoing perennial shrub with abundant blue flowers, growing up to 3 feet in a spreading clump. Freezes normally prune it back to the ground every winter, but it is root hardy and bounces back in spring. It appreciates afternoon shade in summer but can bloom in sun or shade.

Esperanza

Tecoma stans

Perennial shrub

Esperanza's trumpet flowers begin in May and bloom prolifically all the way through fall. It thrives in scorching heat, growing tall enough to cast light shade on nearby plants. On most sites, the stems will freeze back to the roots in winter but grow back to full height by next summer.

Turk's cap

Malvaviscus arboreus v. drummondii

Perennial shrub

Turk's cap is a low, sprawling Texas native that thrives without fuss in a partly shaded landscape. Its scarlet "lazy hibiscus" flowers and thick, crinkly leaves are a stalwart in any hummingbird garden.

Pride of Barbados

Caesalpinia pulcherrima

Perennial shrub

Pride of Barbados is so tough and puro San Antonio that you can even find it blooming along highway medians, offering up pink, orange, red and yellow flowers that bloom from bottom to top. Plant in full sun; this poinciana requires little more than good drainage. Cut back after winter freezes; it returns to full size in early summer.

Flame acanthus

Anisacanthus quadrifidus

Perennial

A native subshrub whose orange tubeflowers are made-to-order for hummingbirds, butterflies and bees; they festoon the branches like tiny candles all summer long. Anisacanthus is an excellent choice for wildscapes or just for pure mass in new landscaping; it spreads and reseeds generously.

Desert willow

Chilopsis linearis

Small tree

Desert willow is an extremely drought-hardy small tree whose orchid like flowers appear on new wood in summer.

Summer checklist

All months

New plantings

- [ ] Hand water new plantings using the 3-2-1 method as needed for plants in their first summer. Check frequently.

Trees

- [ ] Water established trees once per month during drought if they have not received rain or irrigation.

Turfgrass

- [ ] Mow weekly when grass is growing swiftly, especially after rain.

Irrigation

- [ ] In the absence of rainfall, water turfgrass once per week.
- [ ] Hand water where needed.

June

Turfgrass

- [ ] Mow weekly when grass is growing swiftly.
- [ ] Raise mower blades to avoid scalping the grass.
- [ ] Best month to start native grass seed.

Perennials

- [ ] Cut leggy long-blooming perennials (like salvia) back by one-third to maintain compact form.

July

All plants

- [ ] For wilting plants, check for moisture at a 2 inch depth and hand water if needed.

Turfgrass

- [ ] Water once per week during the dry season to prevent complete dormancy.
- [ ] Turfgrass will normally fade to brown by the end of July as growth slows.

Fall-blooming prairie plants

- [ ] Trim back prairie plants (Maximilian sunflowers, plateau goldeneye, frostweed) to keep them compact for fall blooms.

Backbone plants

- [ ] Avoid heavy shearing in high summer; lightly hand prune stray growth to maintain form.

Succulents and cacti

- [ ] Clip terminal spines from large agaves if needed to protect passersby.

Trees

- [ ] Oak trees may be pruned in the second half of July with oak wilt precautions; including painting cuts immediately.

New landscape beds

- [ ] Solarize grass to prepare for new landscape beds. With solar radiation at its maximum, this is the best time to solarize grass to prepare for new landscape beds.

August

Weeds

- [ ] If there were heavy weeds last spring, a granular pre-emergent can be applied from mid-August to mid-September.

Landscape beds

- [ ] Continue solarizing grass for future landscape beds.

Backbone plants

- [ ] Continue light hand pruning of stray growth; avoid heavy shearing.

Roses

- [ ] Avoid heavy pruning; only clean up and lightly prune for the long fall bloom season.

Trees

- [ ] Oak trees may be pruned in August with oak wilt precautions, paint cuts immediately.

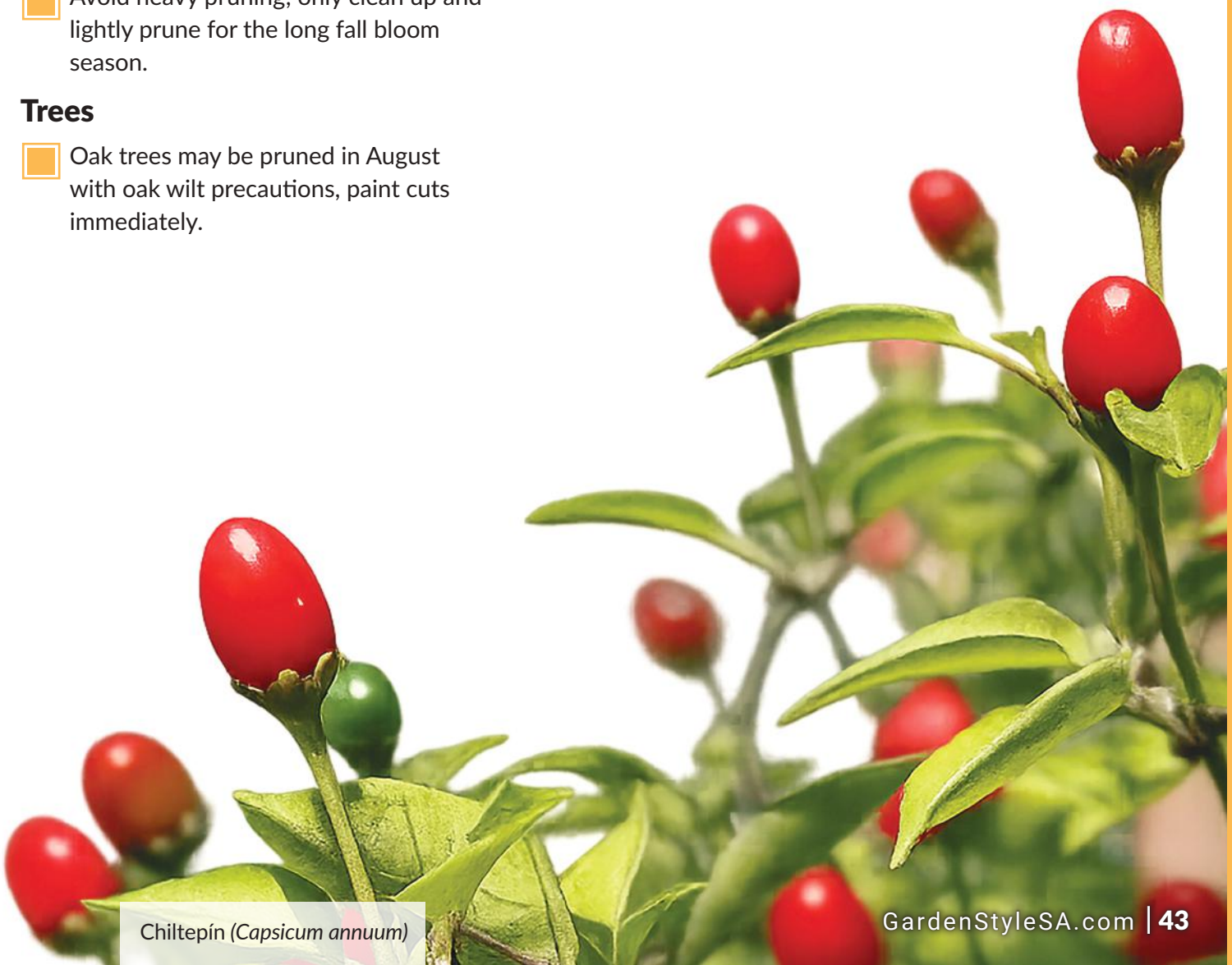
Early September

Landscape beds

- [ ] Prepare new landscape beds for fall planting of trees, shrubs and perennials.

Turfgrass

- [ ] Give yourself a gold star, and your golden lawn too - you've both made it through the heat of summer!



Chiltepín *(Capsicum annuum)*

Summer seasonal tips

Perennials

Mulching

Apply 2–3 inches of mulch over perennial beds and mixed borders to conserve water and cool the soil.

Deadheading

Many well-adapted plants rebloom naturally without the need to deadhead them and increase flowering again in fall.

Removing spent flowers and seed pods can encourage repeat blooms on some plants (like salvias and roses).

Roses

Expect roses to decline in summer heat and revive in autumn.

They can survive without irrigation but bloom best with one deep watering every two weeks during dry spells.

Lightly prune in mid-August to prepare for a long fall bloom season.

Good gardening tip

Turfgrass that is mowed frequently will be thicker and generally look better. Avoid cutting off more than 1/3 of the grass blade with a cutting cycle. If you are an infrequent mower, you may have more luck with native turfgrass mixes or other plants than with non-native turfgrass.

Turfgrass

Mowing

Mow regularly in early summer, especially after rain or irrigation. Raise your mower blades in summer — it helps your grass retain moisture.

Bermuda grass: Mow weekly at 2 inches.

Zoysia: Mow weekly at 2 ½ inches depending on variety.

St. Augustine: Mow weekly at 3 to 3½ inches; extra height supports deeper roots.

Buffalo grass: Mowing (if at all) in summer only, 4 inches or higher.

Adjust mower height by grass type

Native grass mixes: Mowing (if at all) once or twice per year, 4 inches or higher.

Turf sedges: Mowing not generally recommended.

Dormancy

Warm-season turfgrasses slow growth and begin to go gold by mid-July.

Drought-tolerant turfgrass can survive up to 60 days without water if soils are 6 inches deep or more.

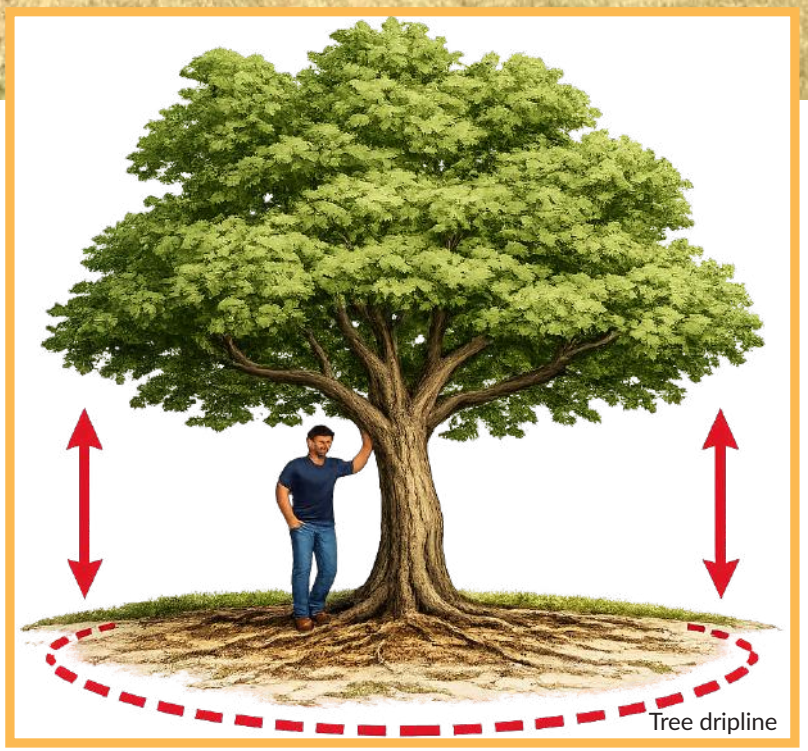
Water deeply and infrequently, once per week, to support healthy roots. Green growth will return with rain and cooler temperatures..

Pest control

Apply a labeled insecticide for grubs or chinch bugs in June if damage occurred last year or you find more than three grubs per square foot.

If you are unsure of the cause of lawn damage, contact the Bexar County AgriLife Extension Service for assistance.

A tree's fine feeder roots can extend outward twice as far as its trunk height. To get the biggest impact from hand watering during drought, concentrate efforts on the area around and inside the dripline.



Trees

Watering established trees

- Active roots are in the top few inches of soil around the drip line (shown in red).
- Protect this zone during construction.
- Avoid trenching or compaction.
- Focus irrigation in this area during drought.

Backbone plants and shrubs

Keep them thriving in the heat

- Avoid heavy hedging during the hot season.
- Trim lightly on new growth only or hand prune stray branches to maintain natural shape.
- Do not hard prune in summer — it causes stress even to established plants.

Annuals and potted plants

Plant early and tend carefully

Any summer annuals should be planted well before extreme heat begins.

Mulch and hand water to prevent recent transplants from drying out quickly.

Raised beds, potted plants and containers dry out much faster than plants in the ground and may require more frequent watering even if planted with perennials. In some cases, true desert plants like agaves and yuccas may be better suited to conditions in containers.

Black-chinned hummingbird with Turk's cap *(Malvaviscus drummondii)* in summer

The wildscape in summer

Avoid watering flowers from the top because the water washes off nectar; instead, water the roots. Water deeply but infrequently for the best impact.

A source of water is an important element for any wildscape. A bird bath can be extravagant or simple. Many birds prefer a shallow, concrete saucer that sits on a raised pedestal. Place it within six feet of the cover of a small tree or shrub, but not so close that a hiding cat can reach it in a single pounce. Birds enjoying their bath or preening with wet feathers are vulnerable to surprise attacks.

The water should be shallow (2 inches or less). To prevent mosquitos from breeding in the water, rinse and refill frequently, or add mosquito dunks containing organic *Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt)*.

Good gardening tip

If your A/C condensate line provides a steady drip of water, direct it through a length of tubing into a shallow gravel basin or pollinator puddling area. It keeps water moving (deterring mosquitoes) and turns a waste source into a wildlife benefit.

Elements of a butterfly garden

It is no coincidence that WaterSaver gardens are also great butterfly gardens; the delight of living color leads many homeowners to add pollinator gardens with drought-resilient plants that bloom after even the slightest smattering of summer rain. Add basking places, shelter, food and water to maximize enjoyment of butterflies during all seasons.

Basking places and shelter

- Create flower edges to attract butterflies.
- Layer with lower flowering plants along lawns and taller perennials towards the back.

Provide winter shelter

- Many butterflies hibernate as adults in perennials, bark, or logs.
- Others overwinter as eggs, larvae, or pupae.
- Delay cutting back perennials until late winter.
- Leave a “rough” area in the landscape for year round protection.

Water to drink

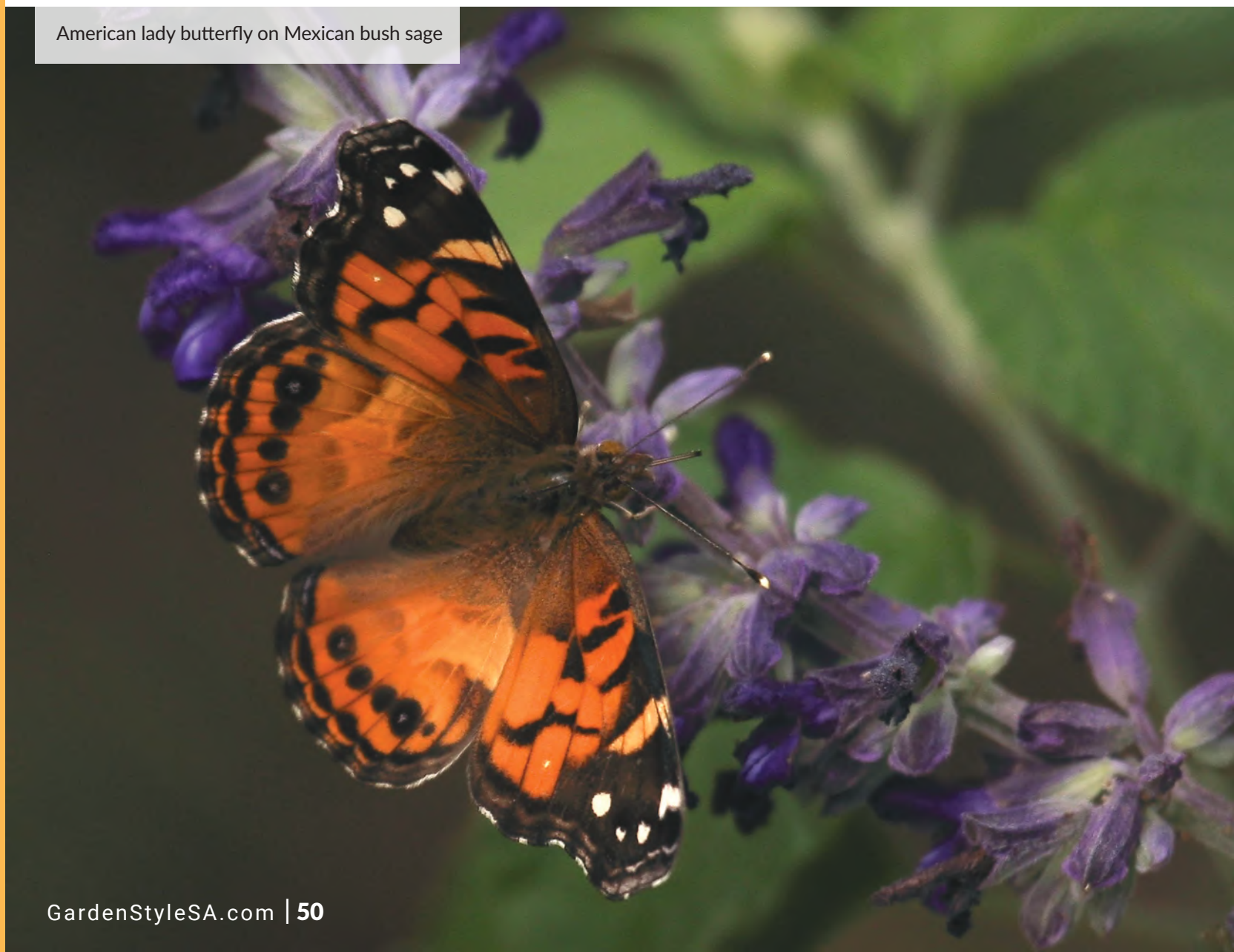
- Fill a shallow dish with sand. Approximately one inch from the top, add pebbles for the butterflies to land on, then add water.
- Do not use a sprinkler to water butterfly plants as this can dilute or wash nectar away completely.

Nectar and larval food

- Plan for year-round blooms to provide nectar in every season.
- Preserve or recreate native understory areas under trees for protection and larval food.
- Include larval host plants such as dill, parsley, milkweed, native grasses, perennials, shrubs, and trees.
- Mix them with nectar plants or grow them in containers.
- With host plants, you can raise your own butterflies.
- Plant native grasses for skipper butterfly larvae; they also produce seeds for birds.
- Add fruiting native plants like grapes, dewberries, Mexican plum, Texas persimmon, and passionflower to provide food for butterflies and birds.

Help butterflies survive habitat loss

Texas has more butterflies than any other state. However, like all other parts of the country, our open spaces are being developed. You can help by providing suitable habitat in the home landscape and minimizing the use of pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals.



American lady butterfly on Mexican bush sage

Good gardening tip

Avoid fertilizing during establishment. Native grasses grow best with minimal input — too much nitrogen can encourage weeds and weaken long-term drought tolerance.

Pocket prairie planting

Summer is not the best time to establish new plants or install turfgrass. However, it is a good time to grow native turfgrass from seed, such as buffalo grass or mixes with blue grama, curly mesquite, and other Texas natives. The seeds can be hand watered to keep them moist while sprouting in small WaterSaver areas.

- Pick a site with full sun. Afternoon shade is more tolerable than morning shade.
- Start with bare soil. Preparation is key; if Bermuda grass isn't eliminated, it can easily take over. Plan ahead and cover Bermuda grass with sheet mulch up to a year in advance of seeding, starting in spring, to fully eliminate it.
- In late May or early June, sow the grass seeds as directed on your seed mix. Timing the planting in the early summer avoids confusing the native grass sprouts with undesirable plants like winter weeds.
- Water the seeds in and keep the soil moist until the grasses begin to germinate.
- Hope for early summer rains to carry the seedlings through the tender early weeks.
- In the absence of rain, hand water to prevent the grass from going dormant. It might even require weekly watering. Think of this as a water investment to keep the grass healthy while it knits together for better coverage.
- The first winter, you'll need to remove any green weed grass sprouts, like rescue grass, to give your turf the best chance when it begins growing next spring.

Remember: Native turfgrasses don't stay green all summer long. Like many turfgrasses, they tend to naturally go dormant (brown) in late summer and in winter. In extreme drought conditions, they may require supplemental water to prevent excessive dieback.

Fall

October-November

Fall is THE season for gardening joy in South Central Texas. With the relentless summer now behind us and several months of relatively mild temperatures ahead, this is hands down the best time of year for planting trees, shrubs and many perennials. No matter what surprises winter may bring, plant roots will keep growing year round in South Central Texas, and planting now gives plants a long head start before their first summer. A bonus: the water needs of all plants, including turfgrass, drop dramatically in the fall when days are naturally shorter and often cooler.

Fall seasonal stars

Consider planting a “seasonal star” from each season in this guide to have a focal piece for every season.

Cenizo Texas Sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*)

Muhly grass

Muhlenbergia capillaris

Bunch grass

Gulf muhly’s wire-like foliage and pink flower plumes make a joyous display in autumn. It is one of several recommended muhlies that require no special care and make great companions for low-growing WaterSaver perennials for a classic “spikes and mounds” effect.

Cenizo (Texas sage)

Salvia leucantha

Large shrub

Cenizo is evergreen, with silvery foliage and sweet-scented pink flowers that paint the hillsides of South Texas after rains in summer and fall. Tolerating poor soil, full sun, and drought, it is among the most drought-tolerant of all large landscape shrubs and makes a useful standard by which others can be measured. Compact varieties are available to minimize the need for hedging.

Autumn sage
Salvia greggii

Perennial

Salvia greggii is tough, fragrant, compact and available in a wide range of colors, It has a very long blooming period starting in spring and peaking in fall. During most winters, it will stay green.

Bougainvillea
Bougainvillea sp.

Vine / Large shrub

Admired for the red, purple, and fuchsia bracts around its tiny white flowers, bougainvillea is a showstopping tropical vine that grows as a large shrub in San Antonio, where it often freezes back in winter. Abundant thorns make it an effective security fence when planted in the ground. Don't overwater: bougainvillea appreciates water when it gets it, but it "blooms" better under stress.

White mistflower
Asteraceae (Aster Family)

Perennial

There's a mistflower for every occasion, and in every season these native asters are butterfly magnets in the home landscape. The tiny fuzzy blooms of white mistflower are honey sweet on autumn days, perfect for migrating monarchs.

Texas blazing star
Liatris mucronata

Perennial

A perennial native wildflower with grasslike leaves and cheerful wands of pink and lavender flowers in autumn. Liatris' deep bulb-like taproot enables it to thrive even after a long dry summer, equally at home in formal gardens and the native landscape.

Fall checklist

All months

Irrigation

- [ ] Reduce irrigation by seasonally adjusting run times as days shorten and temperatures decrease.

Late September

New plantings

- [ ] To prepare new planting beds, scalp grass with a trimmer or mower, then cover with cardboard and mulch.
- [ ] Check soil moisture frequently during the first two weeks after planting.

Weeds

- [ ] Apply organic pre-emergent (corn gluten) to reduce cool-season weeds.

Turfgrass

- [ ] Continue mowing and watering, on a weekly basis, until warm-season grasses stop growing.
- [ ] Discontinue evening watering to prevent fungal disease in grass.

Perennials and backbone plants

- [ ] Avoid heavy pruning to prevent excessive tender new growth.

October

Mulch

- [ ] Lightly mulch landscape beds (2–3 inches max; keep mulch away from tree trunks).

Weeds

- [ ] Apply organic pre-emergent (corn gluten) to reduce cool-season weeds.

Turfgrass

- [ ] Avoid watering at night (disease prevention).
- [ ] Adjust irrigation controller: reduce watering to 70–80% of summer run time.
- [ ] Continue weekly mowing and watering.
- [ ] Apply 1/4 inch compost to improve moisture retention and relieve soil compaction.

Bunchgrasses and ornamental grasses

- [ ] Avoid heavy pruning; wait until late winter or early spring.

Perennials and backbone plants

- [ ] Plant perennials now to establish before summer heat returns.
- [ ] Lightly prune and deadhead if needed for best display.

Trees

- [ ] Begin planting new trees.
- [ ] Use the 3-2-1 method to gradually reduce watering frequency.
- [ ] Check soil moisture before watering to avoid overwatering

Wildflowers

- [ ] Prepare seedbeds, remove all vegetation to bare soil, spread seeds, lightly rake soil, and water gently. Continue planting up until December.

November

New plantings

- [ ] Continue watering new plantings using the 3-2-1 method as needed.

Mulch

- [ ] Continue light mulching where needed.

Compost

- [ ] Apply compost as needed to improve moisture retention and soil health.

Turfgrass

- [ ] Reduce irrigation to 40% of summer run time or turn it off for the year.
- [ ] Continue mowing until warm-season grasses stop growing.
- [ ] Use a mulch mower to shred and recycle fallen leaves.

Bunchgrasses and ornamental grasses

- [ ] Avoid heavy pruning; wait until late winter or early spring.

Perennials and backbone plants

- [ ] Continue preparing and planting new beds.
- [ ] Avoid heavy pruning to prevent tender growth that may be damaged by freeze.

Trees

- [ ] Plant new trees.
- [ ] Begin pruning shade trees other than oaks.

Wildflowers

- [ ] Continue preparing and sowing wildflower seeds.

Fall seasonal tips

Perennials

Tips for long-lived plants

With shorter days, cooler nights, and hopefully more rain, many plants look their best in fall with little extra water or care.

Early fall is an excellent time to plant new perennials to get them well established before next summer.

Mounding perennials like lantana can be cut back in early November to let sunlight reach germinating wildflowers such as pink evening primrose and bluebonnets. By late spring, perennials will return to full size.

Roses can be spectacular in fall if lightly pruned in August. Avoid overwatering — apply water to roots only to prevent powdery mildew and black spot.

Turfgrass

Water less, watch for fungi

Your grass has already made it through summer, the hardest part of the year. You can reduce watering as fall progresses and the turf growing season ends.

For lawn irrigation, use the seasonal adjust setting: about 90% in September, 70–80% in October, and 40–50% in November. Many people end weekly irrigation after Halloween.

Avoid overwatering—it can cause fungal disease like brown patch, which shows as dead circular spots with "smoke rings."

For issues, connect with a master gardener online at bexarmg.org or call the Bexar County - Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Switch irrigation to mornings in October to help prevent fungal problems.

Autumn is an excellent time to plant new landscape beds with trees, shrubs and hardy perennials.

Trees

Plant trees in fall for a good head start

The best tree planting season begins in fall and continues until early March.

Mulch to preserve moisture and prevent weeds. Refresh mulch up to 3 inches under the canopy; use fallen leaves as free mulch or apply shredded cedar/hardwood. Leave a gap between the mulch and the tree trunk.

A mulched tree grows up to 40% faster and is less likely to be damaged by string trimmers.

Fall is also a good time to apply compost or a slow-release organic fertilizer.

Annuals

Fall and winter color made easy

Many cool-season annuals can thrive during our mild winter months, recovering from occasional freezes.

These flowering annuals include: cyclamen, snapdragon and calendula; leafy greens like ornamental kale, cabbage and chard; and herbs like garlic and cilantro.

Plant winter annuals in small groupings to make watering and winter freeze protection easier.

Weed control

Act in early fall, weed less in spring

If you had a major weed problem last winter or spring, corn gluten can be applied by early October, before soil temperatures fall below 70°F.

Corn gluten lasts about five weeks, so reapply later in fall if cooler weather is delayed.

It's too late to use pre-emergents once winter weeds begin germinating.

Cool-season weeds appear when soil drops below 70°F; remove new sprouts early by scuffing or pulling.

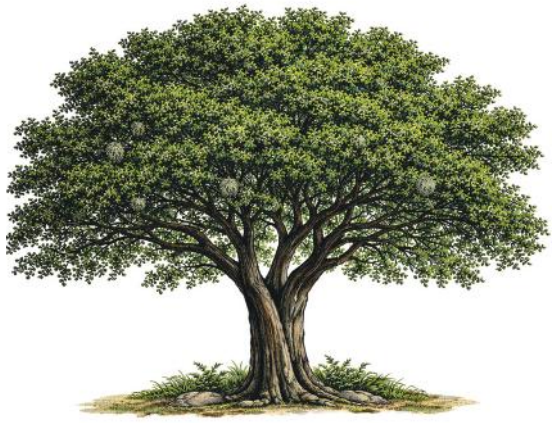
Keep mowing to prevent summer weeds from seeding; they will decline naturally as weather cools.

Tree planting: Five rules of a healthy, long-lived tree

With increasing temperatures and drought in South Central Texas, the beneficial protection offered by trees is more important than ever for both you and your landscape. Every single conversion of turfgrass to garden beds offers a fresh opportunity to include a valuable new tree, safe from the whirling blades of lawnmowers and string trimmers. Select species appropriate to the scale of your landscape; for smaller lots, smaller trees may be more practical.

Extreme weather takes a toll on long-lived trees, so working to maintain a useful shade canopy is an important task and a constant opportunity.

Some of the more drought-resilient options to consider for the San Antonio area are featured below. As always, trees can grow much taller on more fertile sites and may be considerably smaller in thin, rocky or dry soils. See the Find-a-Plant tree lists at **GardenStyleSA.com** to find more recommendations that may be suitable for your site conditions.



Large Typically >40 feet at maturity	**Medium** Typically 25-40 feet at maturity	**Small** Typically 10-25 feet at maturity
Bur oak	Texas red oak (Spanish oak)	Texas redbud
Chinkapin oak	Anaqua	Mexican plum
Mexican white oak	Lacey oak (Blue oak)	Desert willow
Sugar hackberry	Honey mesquite	Ashe juniper
Cedar elm	Osage orange	Bluewood condalia
Escarpment live oak	Huisache (Sweet acacia)	Texas mountain laurel
Mexican sycamore	Arizona cypress	Texas persimmon

Tree planting

At the nursery, inspect your tree and look for unblemished single trunks with a firm root ball. Avoid any tall “lollipop” specimens where all the branches have been removed; you’d rather select a specimen with a good spread of branches from top to bottom. Beware of tall trees in small containers — they’ve spent too much time in a pot.

Location, location, location:

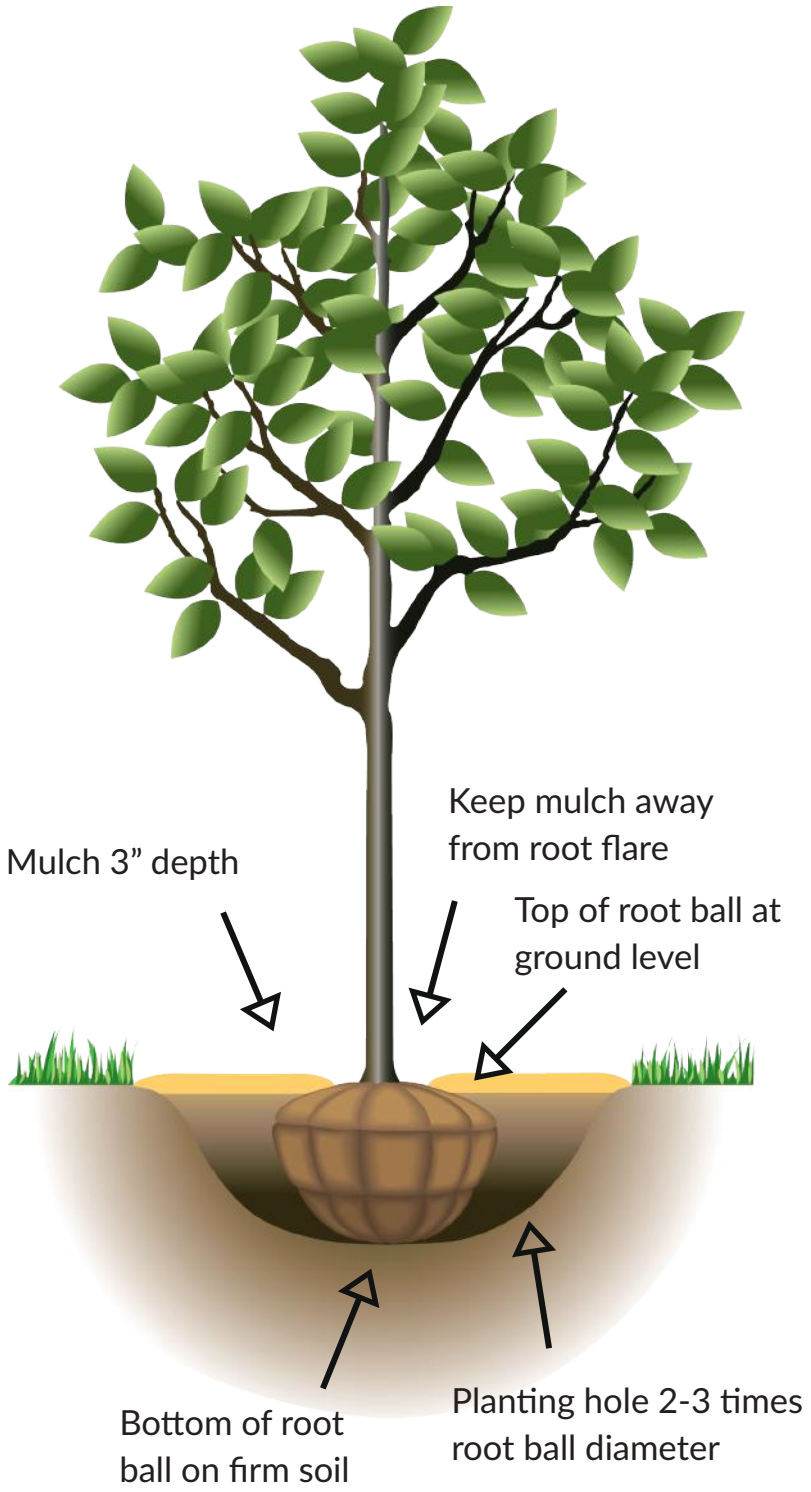
- Call 811 to have your gas lines marked before selecting a location. Large trees should be planted no closer than 10-15 feet from a gas line.
- Locate large trees (over 40 feet at maturity) no closer than 20 feet from a building; medium trees (25 to 40 feet at maturity) no closer than 10 feet from a building; and all trees no closer than 15 feet from a telephone pole, fire hydrant or driveway. Obviously, trees do not read these guidelines, and you can find examples of them breaking the rules everywhere you look, but carefully locating new trees can help avoid costly repairs later.

Dig a hole, no deeper than the root ball or container, and at least twice as wide as the root ball.

Place the root ball in the center of the hole and add fill if necessary to ensure that the top of the root ball is planted level with the ground, or even a little higher. The root ball will compact and sink into the ground over time as the potting soil compresses, so planting at the correct level can prevent the tree’s trunk flare and tissues from becoming buried underground.

Backfill the planting hole with a mixture of the existing native soil and a small amount (less than 15%) of compost.

Cover the planting area with 2 inches of mulch in a radius of at least 3 feet. Leave 6 inches of soil uncovered around the trunk so that no mulch is touching the trunk. Do not push mulch into a “volcano” up against the trunk: it can cause rotting at the tree base.



Use your leaves

Leaves are reservoirs of nutrients and sources of nitrogen and organic material that can be recycled into your soil. The easiest way to achieve this is just to let them decompose where they fall in your yard. To speed up the process of decomposition, run the lawn mower over the leaves. They will disappear in 3 to 6 weeks, and the soil will be better for it.

Mulched beds

If your neatness will not permit you to let leaves lie, rake them up and use them as mulch for the shrub border and the garden beds. Leaf mulch reduces water evaporation, keeps the soil cool, reduces weed pressure and adds nutrients to the soil. In highly alkaline soils like ours, the addition of a slightly acidic mulch in the form of pecan and oak leaves may help free other nutrients for plants to use.

Compost pile

Leaves are basic raw material for a compost pile. Fill a 5-foot circle formed with 4-foot-high hog wire with leaves mixed with a cup of lawn fertilizer for every 1 foot of depth. Keep it moist and the material will decompose to compost in a couple of months. Use the compost as soil conditioner in your vegetable and flower gardens.

Gifts for gardeners

If we have still not convinced you that your leaves are too valuable to be wasted in the landfill, consider giving them to a neighbor. Use the green organics bin to transport them.

Good gardening tip

Instead of bagging all your leaves, either use a mulching mower to help fertilize the lawn naturally or rake them into the landscape

Planting spring wildflowers

Fall is the time to sow seeds for spring wildflowers. If you have a sunny, well drained area that you're willing to leave less manicured, a wildflower bed might be a great option.

Many wildflowers will need at least eight hours of bright sun in spring to thrive and bloom. Planting on the shady side of your house or under a large oak tree will not yield as much success, unless you specifically choose shade-tolerant species.

Invest some time in preparing your wildflower area:

- Clear the area of competing weeds. If you use contact herbicide, wait two weeks before spreading seeds.
- Cut any grass down in the area as close to the ground as possible.
- Rake the prepared area to create a shallow till. Deep tilling several inches down will only bring up competing weed seeds.
- Buy locally appropriate seeds and check the recommended planting date. The seeds must be spread early enough to give the plants time to get established and bloom before it gets hot.

The key to success is good "seed-to-soil" contact. That means applying seed to bare soil and gently rolling or combing over the area to force the seeds into the soil. To spread them more uniformly, you can try mixing them with a little sand. Some seeds will be visible, while others will be barely covered; this is normal.

Water the planted area carefully: over watering can wash the seeds away. Ideally, the area should remain moist for two to three weeks after planting — perfect when the weather provides foggy, dewy mornings.

While this may seem like a lot of work, the display of color in spring is more than worth it. After bloom is finished, the plants should be allowed to go to seed to get a repeat show next year.

Evergreen sumac *(Rhus virens)*

Winter

December - Mid-February

Winter is the second-best season to plant new trees, shrubs, and some perennials in South Central Texas, because there are still plenty of mild, pleasant days for plants to get their roots established before summer heat returns. That said, the first freeze and hard freezes of the year will often transform the landscape from green to brown. Plants that remain green — cactus, yucca, rosemary, holly, native shrubs, Texas mountain laurel, live oak and some palms — provide structural form to the landscape in winter.

Winter seasonal stars

Consider planting a "seasonal star" from each season in this guide to have a focal piece for every season.

Possumhaw

Ilex decidua

Small tree

Possumhaw may not be noticed much during the rest of the year, but it is a terrific accent in winter when it drops its leaves, revealing a profusion of red berries. It can be grown under other trees but will produce more berries with more sunlight.

Yaupon holly

Ilex vomitoria

Small tree

Yaupon is a native holly with shiny evergreen leaves and bright red berries (on female plants) during the winter. It can be cultivated as small tree, a tall hedge along fences or an understory plant; dwarf varieties are also available.

Rosemary
Salvia rosmarinus

Perennial

Many rosemary varieties thrive in San Antonio. Upright rosemary, so tough and evergreen that it is sometimes compared to a barbecue skewer, makes a useful foundation shrub. Trailing varieties can provide an informal groundcover or cascade down walls and slopes.

Frostweed
Verbesina virginica

Perennial

Frostweed is a unique herbaceous biennial with large, soft leaves, plentiful white flowerheads in autumn, and a surprise on the first freeze of every year when the stems transform into playful ice sculptures. The autumn flowers are terrific for attracting butterflies.

Big Bend yucca
Yucca rostrata

Succulent

San Antonians can choose from a variety of evergreen yuccas, nolinas, and sotols that maintain architectural form even in the coldest winter temperatures. Big Bend yucca is one of the bluest and softest of the bunch.

Century agave
Agave americana

Succulent

Icy blue agave provides dramatic winter form and a focal point in the landscape. The spiny leaf tips provide easy hangers for winter decorations; they can be routinely snipped off afterwards to provide safe passage for passersby.

Winter checklist

All months

Irrigation

- [ ] Remove hoses from outdoor faucets before freezes and protect vulnerable fixtures.
- [ ] Turn weekly automatic irrigation off and water manually if needed once per month in the absence of rainfall.

Freeze protection

- [ ] Use fallen leaves to mulch landscape beds.
- [ ] Anchor cloth, burlap or sheets around tender plants for freeze protection. Move frost-tender potted plants into protected areas. Remove coverings once freeze danger has passed.

Freeze-damaged plants

- [ ] Use a light touch with damaged plants. Wait for spring growth to determine the level of damage before pruning.
- [ ] For frost-damaged succulents, cactus and agave, mushy tissue can be removed.

Winterize your workspace

- [ ] Add a winter fuel additive to the lawnmower gasoline to prevent gum and varnish deposits from forming.
- [ ] Change engine filters, replace engine oil, and sharpen mower blades.
- [ ] Clear out old chemicals and hazardous materials and dispose of properly at a household hazardous waste site.

December

New plantings

- [ ] Test soil before watering to avoid overwatering. Hand water new plantings and trees if needed.

Turfgrass

- [ ] Improve soil health by mulch-mowing fallen leaves into the turfgrass. Leaves can also be raked into landscape beds as mulch.

Perennials

- [ ] Best time to relocate any perennials by transplanting (December–January).

Shade trees

Oaks

- [ ] To prevent the risk of oak wilt, finish pruning oaks before the end of January. Follow oak wilt prevention procedures, including painting wounds and cleaning tools between trees.

Trees other than oaks

- [ ] Prune shade trees (other than oaks) when they are bare, usually beginning in November and continuing through mid-March.

January

Weeds

- ☐ Continue hand pulling, scuffing, and mowing winter weeds.

Turfgrass

- ☐ Continue mulching fallen leaves with a mulch mower.

Trees

- ☐ Finish pruning oak trees; follow oak wilt prevention procedures.
- ☐ For other shade trees, pruning season continues until early March.

Early February

Weeds

- ☐ Best month to apply corn gluten to prevent spring/summer weeds. Note: pre-emergents suppress wildflowers.

Perennials

- ☐ Wait to prune until new growth appears.

Roses

- ☐ Begin annual rose pruning after Valentine's Day as buds begin to swell.

Backbone plants

- ☐ Perform renewal pruning for size control in late winter.

Trees

- ☐ DO NOT prune oak trees; the risk of oak wilt is now high.
- ☐ For other shade trees, pruning season continues until buds break in early March.

Winter seasonal tips

Perennials

Protect and prep perennials for spring

There is no need to rush cutting back damaged plants after a freeze. It's often better to wait to assess damage once they start growing again in March — particularly for agaves, palms and fruit trees. The dried foliage can serve as a layer of additional protection in the event more freezes occur.

Roses are winter hardy, and no special care is required to protect them from cold temperatures in South Central Texas. In fact, you can begin to prepare them for spring by pruning in late winter, around Valentine's Day (see Spring).

Once winter settles in, structure in the landscape is provided by hardy plants that withstand frost without dropping thier leaves. It's an excellent time to gift friends and family with evergreen shrubs, perennials, and native plants.

Winter is a great time to tackle outdoor living projects like pervious pathways, patios and other hardscapes.

Turfgrass

Warm season turfgrass is dormant in winter

Let sleeping grass lie … don't wake it with water.

The best controller setting for turfgrass irrigation in winter is OFF.

If you continue to water weekly, use your irrigation controller's seasonal adjust feature to lower the run time to 40% in November and 10-20% in December, January and February.

If you had severe weed problems in turfgrass areas last summer, consider the application of corn gluten or pre-emergent herbicides. This should be done by mid-February, before warm-season weeds germinate.

Winter is the best time for aeration and top dressing. Use an aerator that cuts plugs from the yard rather than a spike aerator. Applying one-half inch of compost after aeration contributes to healthy lawn and water conservation.

Trees

Winter guide to tree care

The tree planting season continues until early March.

This is also the best time to prune most shade trees. For more on pruning, go to page 70.

For spring-blooming ornamental trees that bloom on old wood, such as redbud and mountain laurel, wait until after they bloom to perform pruning.

Pruning should be done thoughtfully.

Annuals

Brighten your winter beds

Well-adapted annuals can thrive and bloom during our mild winter months. Our rare freezes may set them back, but they usually recover. Pockets of cool season annuals planted where summer perennials are dormant can spruce up the winter landscape. An easy way to accomplish the look is to simply place containers with annuals among mixed borders.

Poinsettias should be grown in bright light but not full sun. Poinsettias and other tender potted plants will need to be moved inside for protection during freezing weather.

To prune or not to prune?

Prune to control plant size, remove unsafe branches, remove dead wood and, in some cases, to shape or maximize production of flowers. If the city's brush collection schedule doesn't align with your pruning dates, you can schedule an off-cycle brush collection for a fee by calling 311. Oak trees should be pruned in December and January while it is too cold for sap beetles to spread disease (see below). For many other plants and trees, February is the perfect time for pruning.

Pruning oaks

Although some oaks are more resistant to oak wilt than others, any species can contract the disease. This means any of the local oak species in South Central Texas, including live oak, red oak, Shumard oak, Spanish oak, and even somewhat resistant species like bur oak, lacey oak and Monterey oak. For oaks, paint any wounds over 1 inch in diameter within 30 minutes after cutting to prevent oak wilt. Spray or brush on any type of paint, including latex, oil-based, or wound dressing.

Crape myrtles

Crape myrtles are the species most savaged by our urge to prune. They bloom on the new wood that grows in spring, so the theory is that heavy pruning stimulates lots of new wood. The theory is correct, but to get the maximum bloom, you do not need to hack off the tops to leave unsightly stubs. If your crape myrtle is relatively young and growing in full sun, it should put on enough new growth that pruning is unnecessary.

Roses

Old-fashioned roses are often only pruned when they get out of hand, but the modern hybrid tea roses are blooming machines that do best when they are pruned every year, ideally in late February. Select three or four main stems that are finger- to thumb-size in diameter to preserve. They should be spread around the plant, arising above the graft, and radiating at a 60-degree angle from the main trunk. Remove branches inside this frame so the middle is open to air and light. Also remove wounded or tangled wood and wood growing inward or straight up. Do not be afraid to cut! It is hard to over prune a modern rose.

Thinning cuts

Thinning cuts are the best **(see diagram below)**.

A thinning cut occurs when you follow the offending branch to its origin on another branch and cut it there.

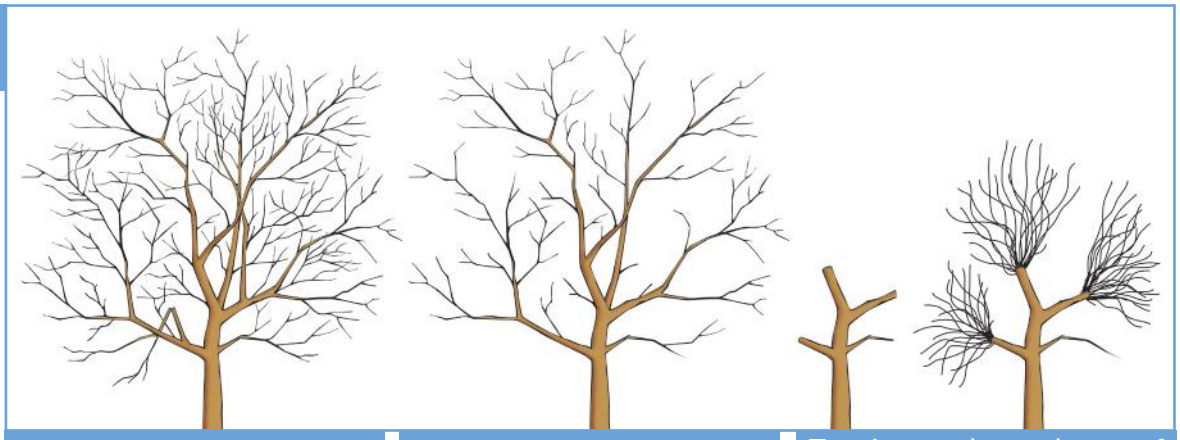
Hedging cuts

Hedging cuts are less desirable because they disrupt the tree's hormonal control. Hedging cuts remove part of a branch, leaving a stub.

Topping

The biggest mistake homeowners make is cutting all branches to the same length, a practice known as "topping". This shearing of structural branches is unsightly and ultimately weakens the tree.

A look at pruning



Before pruning | Well-pruned, open head | Topping produces clumps of uncontrolled growth

Thinning cut (good) | Topping (not good)

Pruning guidelines

Incorrect pruning cuts can encourage bacteria or fungi to infest plants. Cuts on the wrong part of the plant can stunt growth, prevent seasonal blooms, or result in poorly shaped and weak plants. The diagram below will help you determine how to properly make pruning cuts.

Cutting large branches

When you cut, leave the portion of the branch called the "collar" in place. The collar is the outer curve of the branch identified in the diagram below.

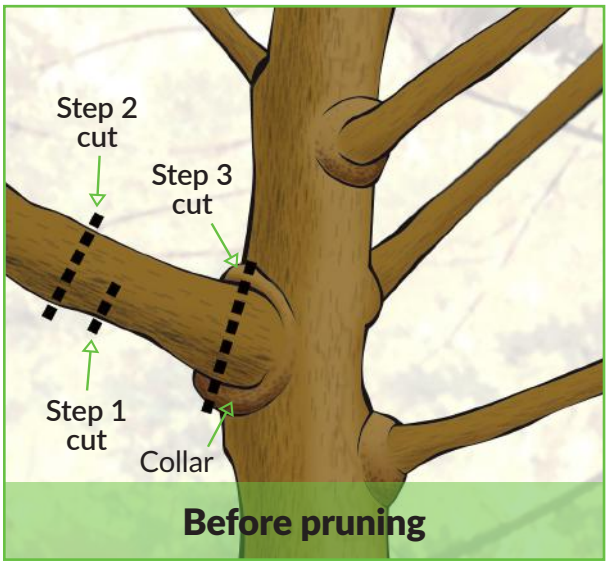
The collar contains protective chemicals that will help your tree or shrub heal more quickly and make infection less likely.

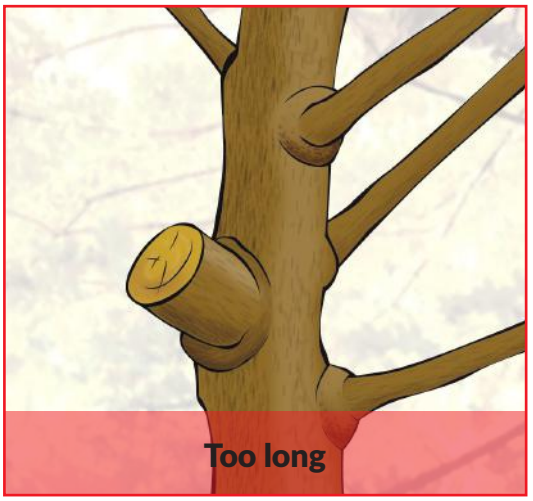
Three-step cutting method

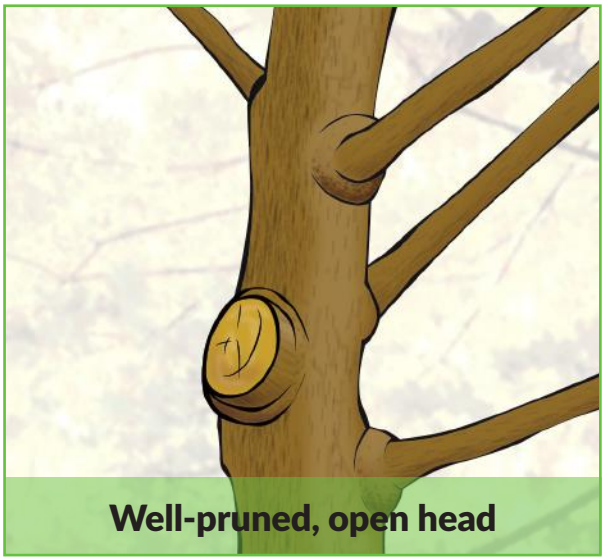
Use these steps for branches more than 1 inch thick. Make sure the limb will not damage anything as it falls from the tree or shrub.

- **Step 1:** Measure about six to eight inches from the trunk. Make a cut on the underside of the branch cutting about a third of the way into the branch.
- **Step 2:** Make a cut clear through the branch about a foot away from the trunk to remove the bulk of the branch. This leaves a long stump.
- **Step 3:** Make a second clean cut just outside the collar to leave a slight stump that will heal well.

Correct three step cutting method

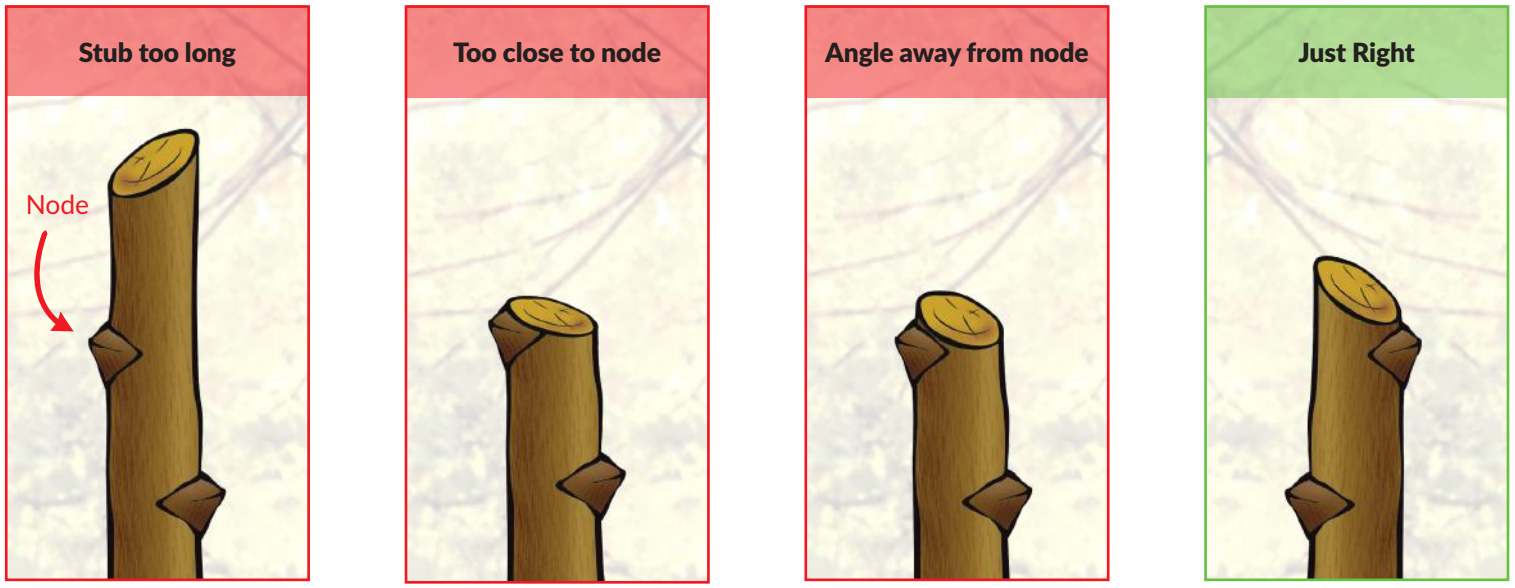






Pruning smaller branches

Nodes are points of growth on branches. You can find them by looking for tiny buds or notches on the branch. The node you leave in place is likely to grow into a new branch in the direction it is facing.



Good gardening tip

Sharp pruning tools are easier on both plants and your muscles. Use a whetstone or knife sharpener.

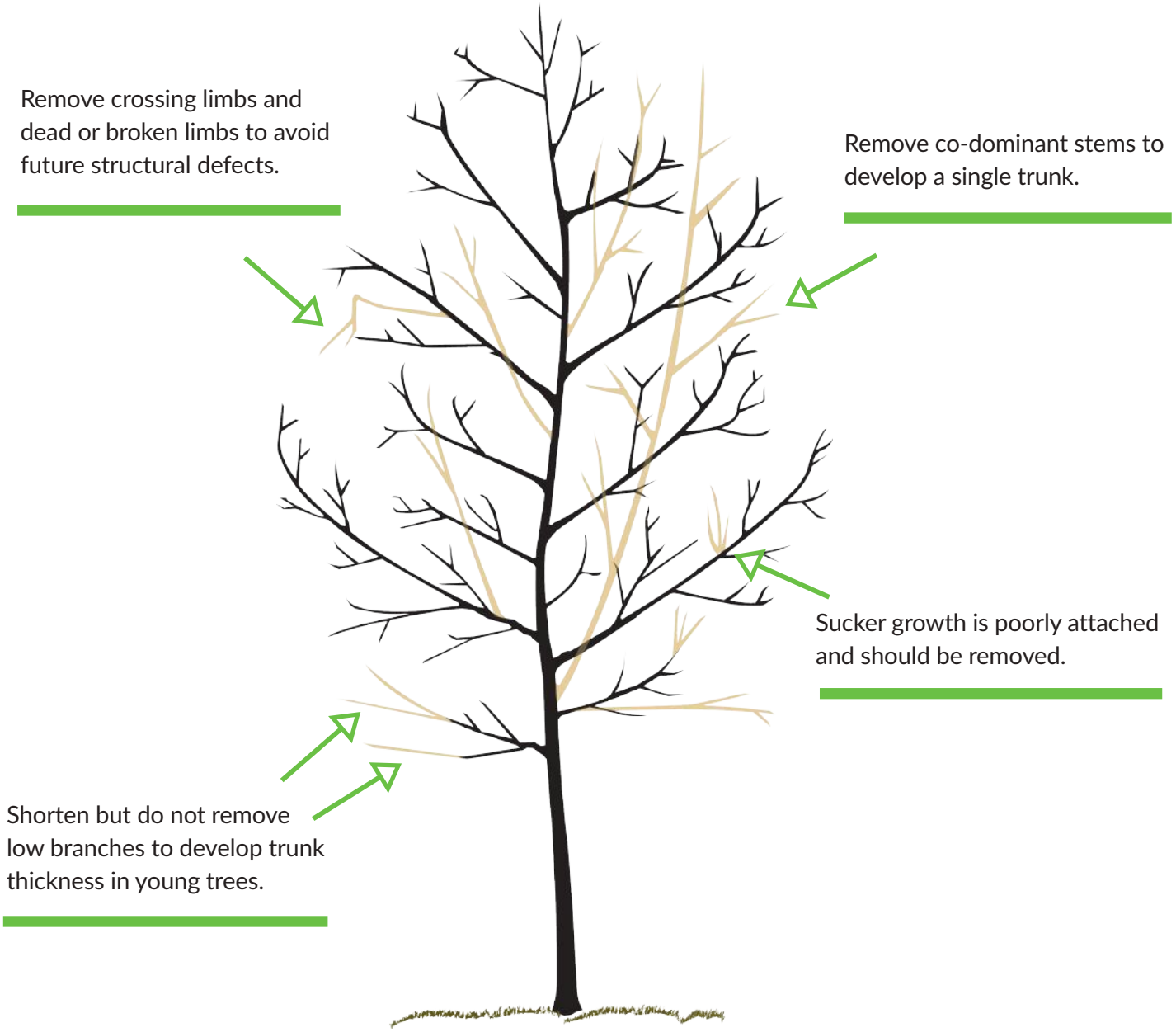
If you suspect a plant you prune may suffer from a bacterial or fungal infection, it is important to clean your pruning tools before using them again. Signs of a problem include a center of rotted wood, split bark, or large dead branches.

Clean pruning tools with a mixture of 5% bleach (20 parts water and one part bleach). Once you are done, apply some tool oil to condition the metal. Appropriate oils for this task can be found at home improvement stores.

Shaping a large tree or shrub

To shape or shorten a large tree or shrub, focus on minimizing the number of dead, damaged, or rubbing limbs and removing co-dominant branching. For the health of a tree, remove no more than 25% of the canopy during any five-year cycle.

- Choose a branch to trim and follow the branch from its tip to its point of origin.
- Make a careful cut of that branch, following the three-step method described on page 71.
- Choose another branch and follow it down to its point of origin and repeat.
- Continue cutting and shaping in this manner until the tree has the desired height or shape.



Frost protection

A healthy, well-adapted and root-hardy WaterSaver plant in the ground with a well-developed root system stands a great chance of recovering after freezing temperatures. It's a much better use of your time and budget to protect exposed pipes and faucets, and in severe freezes, to protect home plumbing.

However, the plants most susceptible to damage are tropical and potted plants.

After a freeze warning, the neighborhood tropical plants often stand out because they've suddenly been covered with sheets, towels, and blankets. Frost cloth can be hard to find at home improvement stores the day before a freeze. Whatever protection you use, make sure the cover reaches all the way to the ground to trap warmth. You can pile mulch or leaves around this perimeter to help keep the fabric in place.

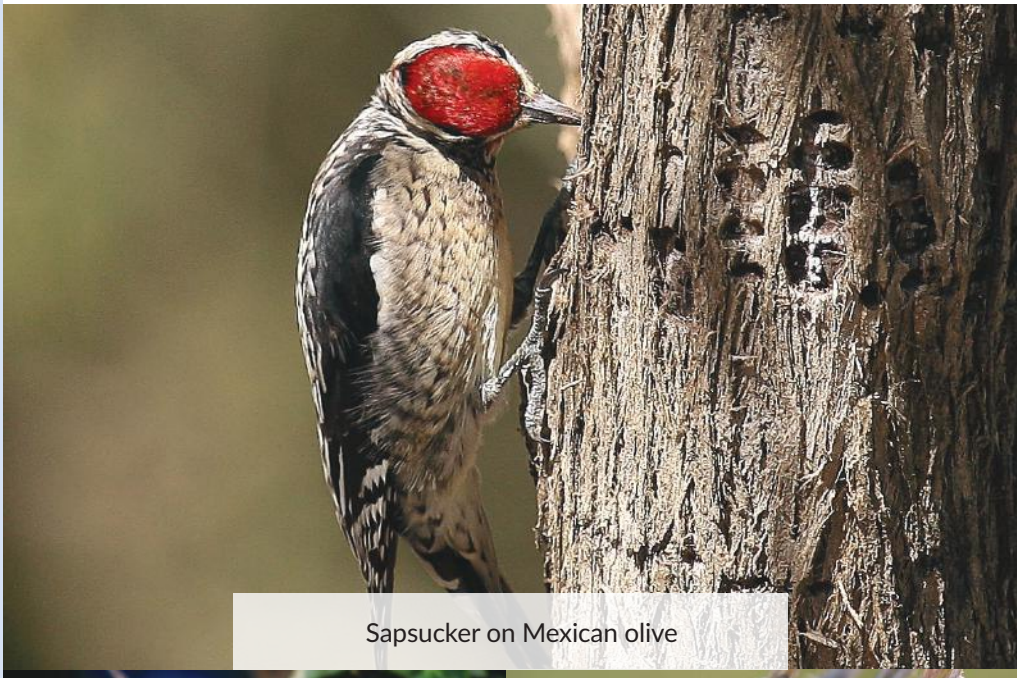
Avoid using plastic! It doesn't insulate as well and can trap freezing moisture inside. Also, if the plastic makes contact with the leaves, they can freeze anyway.

Potted plants are at the most risk since their tops, as well as their roots, are aboveground and exposed to frigid temperatures. Move them indoors if possible or group them in a protected area to make it easier to cover.

The wildscape in winter

Evergreen plants offer cover while grasses and perennials provide seed. Berry producers such as sugar hackberry, hollies, and agarita supply sugars, fats, and nutrients for wildlife.

Enhance your winter garden by simply delaying pruning until early spring, so that small creatures can find more shelter.



Sapsucker on Mexican olive

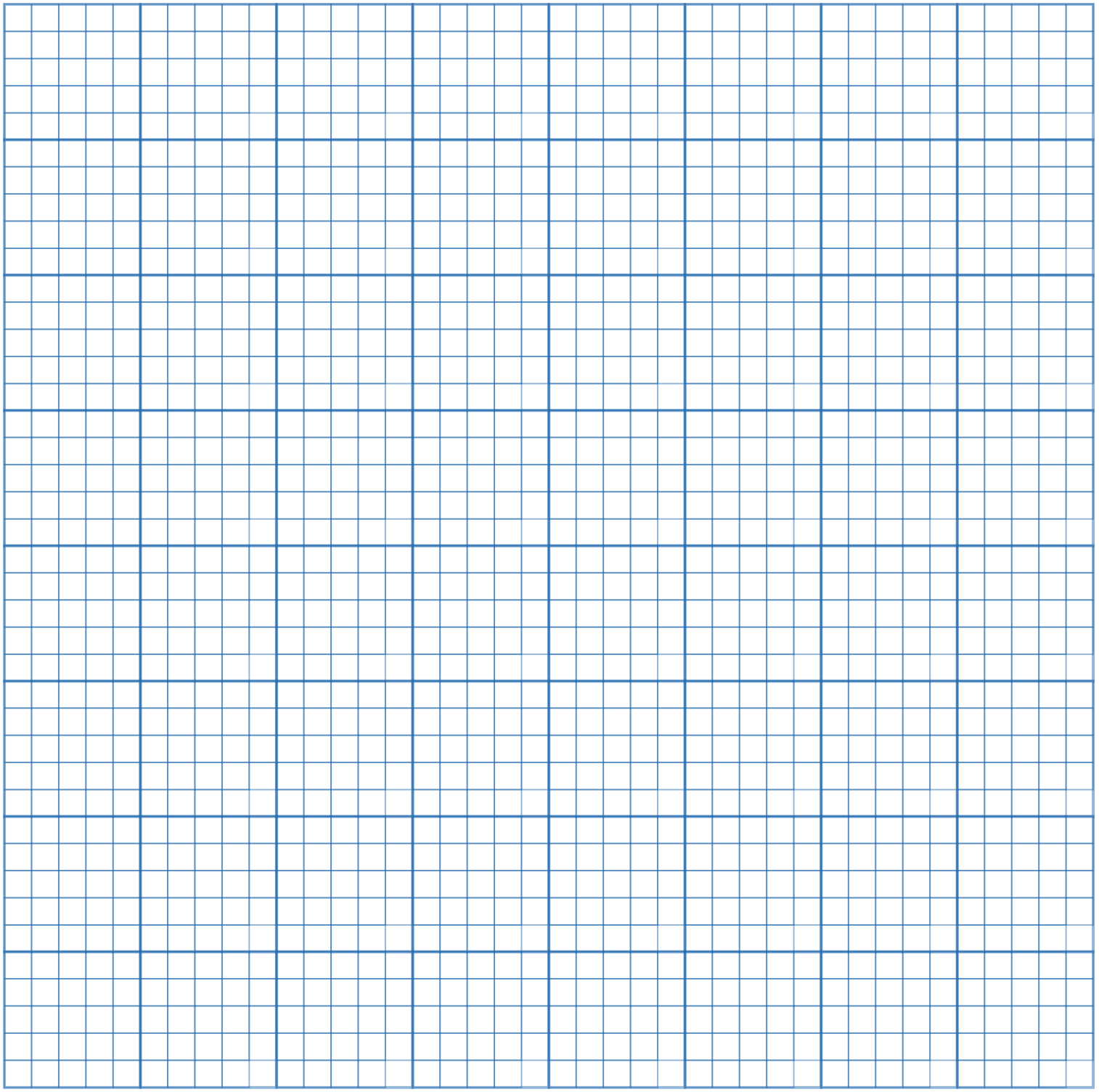
Wintering ruby-throated hummingbird

Myrtle warbler on ocotillo

Blue jay inspecting holly berries

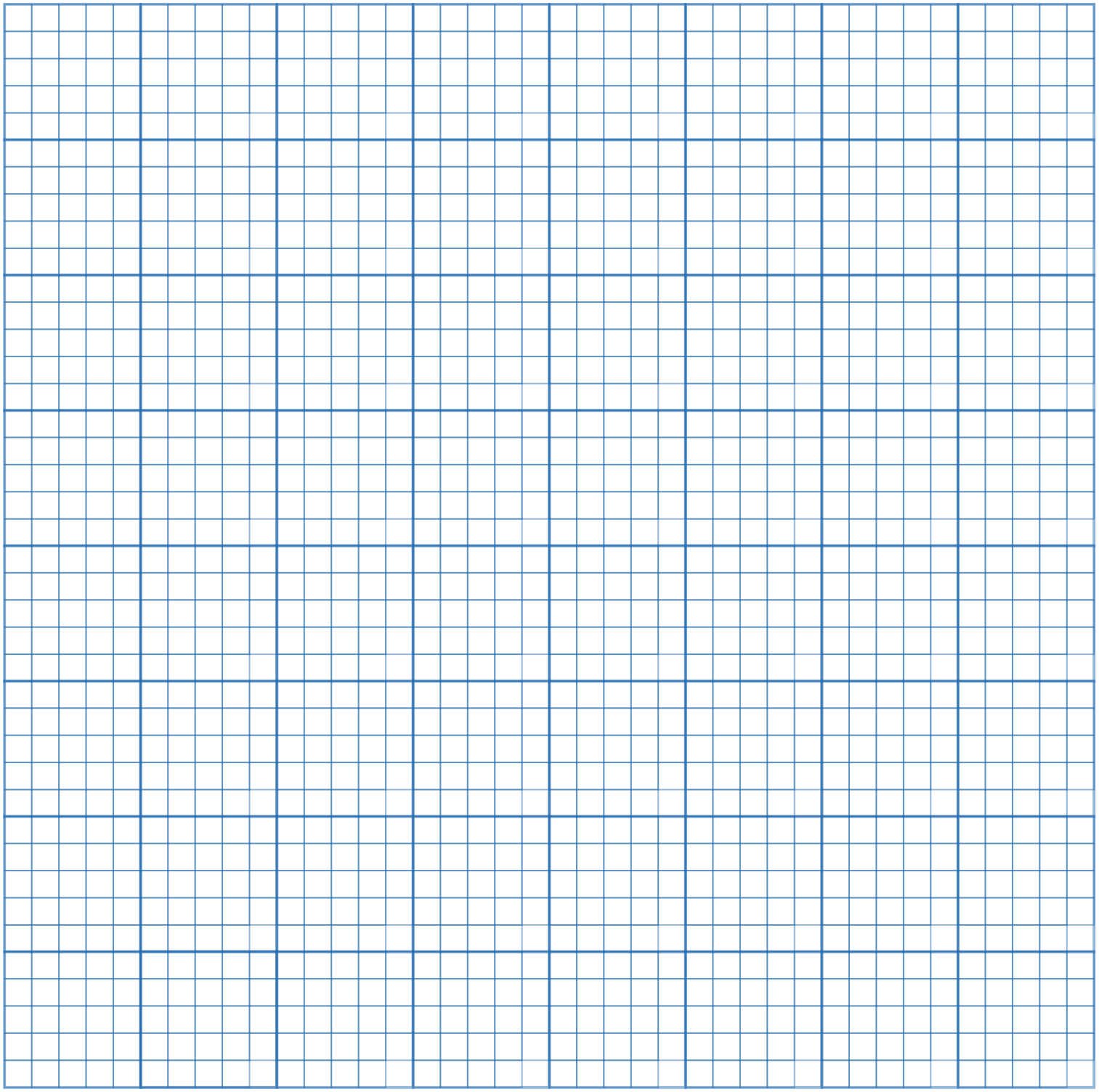
Notes

Map your landscape



Notes

Map your landscape



Glossary

Annual - A plant that completes its entire life cycle in less than one year. Annuals are often used to provide a familiar flash of color for containers and entrances. See Perennial.

Artificial turf - A ground covering of synthetic fibers that can be used as a substitute for natural grass in ballfields, lawns, and other locations where natural turfgrass is not practical.

Backbone plants - Shrubs, perennials, trees and succulents that do not typically freeze or drop leaves in winter, allowing them to provide landscape interest and cover during the cool season.

Bunchgrass - Grasses that grow in a large clump, leaving bare spaces in between that can be filled with wildflowers and other perennials. See Turfgrass.

Chlorosis - An abnormal loss of green coloration in plants, often due to a deficiency of iron.

Compost - Decomposed organic material is used as a plant fertilizer.

Cultivar - A specific variety of a plant produced through cultivation, often through selective breeding.

Deciduous - A plant that loses its leaves at the end of a growing season.

Evapotranspiration (ET) - The loss of moisture from the soil through evaporation (directly into the atmosphere) and transpiration (indirectly through plant roots and plant leaves).

Evergreen - A plant that retains green leaves year round. Evergreen plants still replace their leaves (i.e., live oaks), but are never completely leafless. See Deciduous.

Fertilizer - A substance applied to provide nutrients to soil. Synthetic fertilizers contain manufactured concentrations, while organic fertilizers are naturally produced from animal byproducts, plant products, minerals and ash.

Freeze-hardy - A plants that can typically survive freezing temperatures without permanent injury, even without protective measures.

Frost-tender - Plants or plant parts that can be easily damaged or killed by freezing temperatures.

Groundcover - A low-growing and spreading plant used to cover bare ground in place of turf grass.

Hardscape - Landscape pathways and patios composed of “hard” materials like stone, brick and concrete. Permeable hardscape uses loose aggregate to allow water to pass into the soil below.

Hedge - A shrub trained to form a dense living boundary, define outdoor spaces, and block views.

Herbaceous - Annual and perennial plants with soft stems that do not persist aboveground after the growing season. They can be annual, biennial or perennial.

Hydrozoning - A method of grouping plants with similar water needs in the landscape to conserve water; it allows watering schedules to be customized for each group’s needs.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) - A strategy for controlling garden pests combining a variety of approaches to protect human health and minimize pesticides and other harmful interventions.

Glossary (continued)

Invasive - A non-native plant species introduced by humans harms its new environment, causing ecological or economic problems, outcompeting native plants and degrading habitat. See Native.

Irrigation - The practice of applying water to land to help grow crops, landscape plants and lawns.

Irrigation system - A permanent installation for controlled distribution and conservation of water to help grow crops, landscape plants and lawns.

Licensed arborist - An arborist certified in proper care of individual trees, with training and experience in diagnosing tree problems and determining the best way to treat them.

Licensed Irrigator - An irrigation professional licensed by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to install, maintain and service irrigation systems and ensure that safe drinking water does not become contaminated by the incorrect application of backflow devices.

Microclimate - Small factors can contribute to very local conditions in a restricted area; for example, the south side of a house will be warmer on winter nights than the north side.

Mulch - A protective ground covering that reduces evaporation, maintains soil temperature, enriches soil and reduces weed competition.

Native - A plant species that evolved in the ecoregion where it is currently growing. See Invasive.

Perennial - A permanent and persistent plant that has a life cycle lasting longer than one year.

Screen - A dense planting arrangement used to block sightlines or define outdoor spaces; it can include formal hedges, unpruned plantings and formal structures. See Hedge.

Succulent - Plants that store water in their leaves and stems, making them good WaterSaver plants.

Transpiration - The exhalation of water vapor through the stomata of a plant leaf, enabling the circulation of water and nutrients up from the roots and cooling of the plant.

Turfgrass - A grass that grows low and dense when mowed regularly, enabling it to be used for lawns and ballfields. Specialized stems grow parallel to the ground, knitting into a groundcover.

WaterSaver - An attractive and functional landscape designed with drought-tolerant plants and managed with minimal, efficient irrigation.

Wildflowers - Native annuals that can thrive without careful cultivation. Many Texas wildflowers reach their peak in spring, depending on fall and winter precipitation patterns.

Wildscape - A landscape designed with enhanced habitat for local plants and wildlife. Features may include preferred food and host plants, shelter, places to rear young, and water sources.

Xeriscape - A portmanteau of xeric (Greek xeros = dry) and landscape. An attractive and functional landscape designed with drought-tolerant plants and managed with minimal, efficient irrigation.

Zeroscape - A landscape without living vegetation, often with gravel. The term is often confused with “xeriscape” due to phonetic similarity, but they have different meanings. See Xeriscape.

San Antonio Water System

WaterSaver
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