



Recommended Native Landscaping Policies For Colorado Local Governments and Water Providers



The Colorado Native Landscaping Coalition current members:

[Wild Ones, Front Range Chapter](#)

[People and Pollinators Action Network \(PPAN\)](#)

[Audubon Rockies Habitat Hero Program](#)

[Denver Audubon](#)

[Colorado Native Plant Society \(CoNPS\)](#)

[Colorado Wildlife Federation](#)

Colorado has enormous opportunities to save resources and solve environmental problems by shifting landscape practices to favor regionally appropriate native plants.

The Colorado Native Landscaping Coalition affirms that a native plant landscaping transformation is both urgent and feasible. In this document, we recommend an array of measures that local governments and water providers can implement to bring about this change.

Why Transform Colorado Landscaping?

Landscaping with plants that are native to Colorado reduces costs, labor, and water use. It is not a deep mystery why plants native to Colorado thrive in Colorado. They are adapted to our soils and climate, are easier to maintain, and require little or no supplemental irrigation, mowing, soil amendments, fertilizer, or pesticides. This inherent hardiness translates into major savings in both water use and dollars. Native landscaping is distinct from “xeriscaping” which focuses primarily on water savings, rather than a plant’s geographic home or ecosystem role. We emphasize that it is possible to both save water and landscape with native plants.

Native landscaping is an important tool for solving the climate crisis. Native plants foster biodiverse soils which efficiently sequester carbon from the atmosphere. This both reduces greenhouse gases and improves air quality. Deep-rooted native plants and healthy soil also buffer us from the impacts of climate change. They naturally retain water and thus tolerate drought and absorb storm runoff to mitigate flooding.

Native plants are essential to the health and biodiversity of urban and suburban ecosystems. The vast majority of pollinators are dependent on the native “host plants” with which they co-evolved. Without

Photo by: Desneige Hallbert

native plants, the specialist insects that form the foundation of our food web cannot survive. Our native birds and other wildlife depend on that food web, as do we humans.

The good news is that municipal, commercial, and residential landscapes of all types and sizes can help reverse the global biodiversity crisis. By creating networks of native plant landscapes, each patch of habitat — no matter how small — can serve as part of a collective effort to maintain resilient ecosystems and sustain living landscapes for pollinators.

Native habitats provide beautiful urban and suburban green space to support human health. A connection with nature is vital to our psychological and physiological well-being. Nature does not have to be a destination “out there.” It is needed where we spend our daily lives, accessible to all communities. Promoting native landscapes also recognizes the inherent beauty of Colorado and honors the land management practices of Colorado’s Indigenous Peoples who tended this land for millennia.

We don’t mean that every yard and ball field must become native landscapes. Kentucky bluegrass that benefits communities and serves a function should remain. However, it is time to recognize the untapped value that lies in vast acreages of non-native landscapes that serve few social or ecological purposes, yet are maintained at a high financial and environmental cost.

How can local governments and water providers lead the way for their communities to promote native landscaping?

The Colorado Native Landscape Coalition identifies six recommended policy areas below, each with specific action steps.

1	<i>Focus on Communities</i>
2	<i>Reform Development Code</i>
3	<i>Enhance Public Spaces</i>
4	<i>Commit to Environmental Justice</i>
5	<i>Reform the Term “Xeriscaping”</i>
6	<i>Use Financial Incentives Wisely</i>

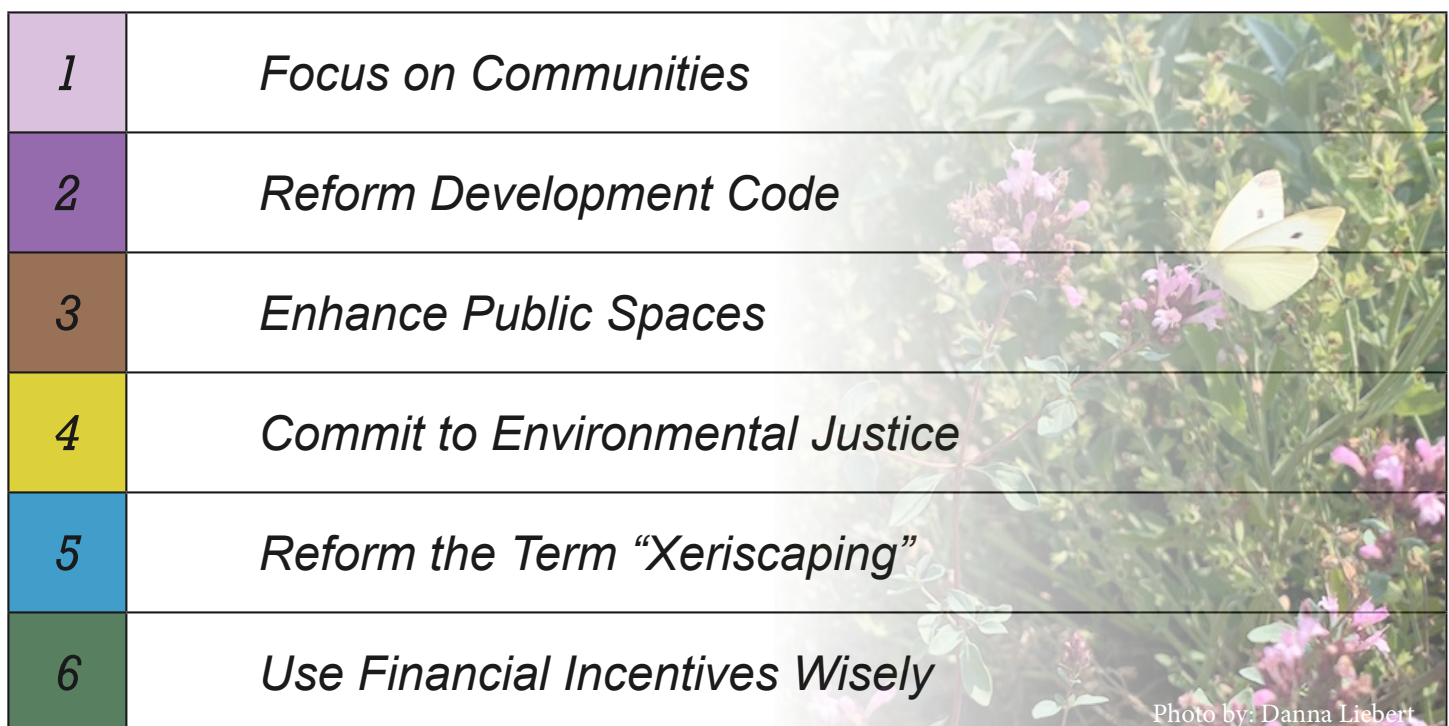


Photo by: Danna Liebert



1. Focus on Communities

Communities know their needs, local environmental conditions, and challenges best. Community input in decision-making is essential for wide-scale change and adoption of native landscaping.

Specific actions

1. Consider establishing a community advisory committee to develop strategies to promote native landscaping.
2. Engage residents, schools, garden clubs, and community groups to support native landscaping projects through volunteer opportunities such as growing native plants from seed, seed and plant exchanges, and garden maintenance days.
3. Establish native landscaping and pollinator habitat demonstration sites throughout the community. Aim for large-scale projects for the most visibility and environmental impact. Provide bilingual interpretive signs and education for adults and youth at these sites. Emphasize nontoxic and organic weed removal and site preparation techniques.
4. Provide free community native landscaping resources, such as regionally appropriate plant lists; nurseries and free sources for untreated native plants and seeds; and native landscaping and turf replacement workshops. Provide multi-lingual access according to community needs.
5. Inventory potential sites to establish native habitat corridors in your community. Consider public parks, grounds of community centers and public buildings, parking lot perimeters, right of ways, streetscapes, rooftops, and closed landfills.
6. Develop community leaders for native landscaping through existing programs such as Audubon's "Habitat Hero" program, PPAN's Safe Communities Program, Colorado Native Plant Society's Certified Native Plant Gardens Program, and CSU Extension's Native Plant Master Program.
7. Work with Homeowner Associations and local groups to promote native landscaping and sustainable land management practices.
8. Inspire and celebrate native landscaping by offering local native garden tours and awards.

Photo by:
Evan Barrientos/
Audubon Rockies



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2. Reform Development Code

Local governments can use development code opportunities to foster native landscaping and regionally appropriate green space.

Specific actions

1. Protect existing native habitat when development occurs.
2. Incentivize native landscaping and reduce non-functional turf and impermeable lot coverage in new development.
3. Develop a list of recommended regionally appropriate native plants to incorporate into development codes and provide to Homeowner Associations and relevant local government agencies.
4. Revise weed ordinances which restrict native habitat landscapes on private properties.
5. Permit and promote no-mow zones in appropriate locations.



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3. Enhance Public Spaces

Properties under the direct ownership of local governments present high-visibility opportunities to model native landscaping for the community.

Specific actions

1. Adopt policies to landscape primarily with native plants on local government properties. Landscaping with native plants makes it more feasible for local governments to commit to reducing or eliminating the use of synthetic fertilizers and chemicals in public landscape maintenance.
2. Build relationships between local government agencies to support native landscape projects.
3. Provide training to Parks Department staff about native plant selection, planting, and maintenance techniques.
4. Set specific goals for how much open space will be transformed into native habitat.
5. Work with the local Parks Department to identify and expand native plants on their plant lists available to horticulture staff.
6. Consider use of organic management for public parks and open spaces.
7. Design an outreach and education campaign to highlight new approaches to landscape creation and management. Water utilities and native landscaping organizations can partner to make this happen. One example could be “native plant days” at nurseries.
8. Sponsor volunteer events to support planting projects and weed removal in public open space.

Photo by:
Deryn Davidson/
CSU Extension, Boulder County



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4. *Commit to Environmental Justice*

Landscape transformation programs should emphasize equity, inclusiveness, and environmental justice. This can help address neighborhood disinvestment, and engage communities who are often not part of the native landscaping discussion.

A transition to native landscaping practices is also an opportunity to acknowledge the harm inflicted on generations of Indigenous Peoples of Colorado, the original stewards of this land, and to honor their values and practices.

Specific actions

1. Allocate native landscaping program resources with equity and inclusion.
2. Use native landscape project opportunities to educate about the native plant heritage from the Indigenous Peoples of Colorado.
3. Ensure that the urban forest tree canopy is equitably distributed throughout the city, planting more trees where needed to achieve this. Promote the planting of native trees where possible.
4. Engage all communities for meaningful involvement in Colorado native landscape projects and decision making.
5. Provide bi-lingual access to education in maintenance practices, and scholarships for certification in native landscaping.





5. Reform the term “Xeriscaping”

The “xeriscaping” term, used since 1981, should be updated to explicitly recognize the many benefits of native plants. Although Colorado must continue to promote low-irrigation landscaping, it is time to also recognize the prime importance of landscaping with native plants within that effort.

Specific actions

1. Water supply and land use organizations should reform the definition of “xeriscape” to emphasize the dominant use of native plants.
2. Revise literature and programs promoting “xeriscaping” to implement this message.



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Danna Liebert



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6. Use Financial Incentives Wisely

Local government and water provider funding for native landscaping and regenerative land management projects can help build resilient, sustainable communities and reduce water bills.

Specific actions

1. Develop funding sources for native landscaping incentive programs. Consider sponsorships, grants, and fundraising events. Implement homeowner turf conversion programs -- with higher levels of assistance for conversions that predominantly use native plants. Many existing turf-replacement programs promote “xeriscaping” and miss the opportunity to promote native plants.
2. Increase the amount of native tree selections in tree discount programs for residents.
3. Provide education about noxious weed species and incentivize mechanical removal where feasible.



Photo by:
Dick Vogel/
Denver Audubon