Grass Replacement Incentive Program (GRIP)

Residential
Grass Replacement Incentive Program (GRIP)

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Purpose
The Grass Replacement Incentive Program (GRIP) aims to incentivize customers to replace high-water turf with water-wise landscapes. These landscapes are attractive, lower-maintenance landscapes that will save water and withstand drought.

Program Specifics

Requirements
Program participants are held to the following requirements:
1. Aurora Water must approve all projects before installation. Rebates are not retroactive.
2. Areas to be converted must have existing grass. See the Eligibility section.
3. Only front and side yards that are readily visible to the public are eligible. Back and side yards behind a fence are not eligible.
4. A 500-square-foot minimum size applies to all projects, unless the project is either the entire front yard or the curbside landscape (the strip of grass between the sidewalk and the street.)
5. A phasing option is available. Each project phase must be a minimum of 500 square feet per year. There is a maximum of one phase permitted per year.
6. Program participation is divided into fall and spring cohorts. Participants can apply to participate in either cohort. See Cohort Structure for details.
7. All single-family home participants are required to enroll in the Know Your Flow (KYF) program. For more information see the Know Your Flow website.

Eligibility
Conservation staff determine GRIP eligibility based on the following:
- The condition of the existing lawn in the front yard based on several recent high-quality photos. Yards that contain barren soil or significant bare patches of soil do not qualify.
- If you recently purchased your home, your property may be eligible for a partial rebate. Contact our office at 303.739.7195 to discuss eligibility.

Cohort Structure
Single family home participants will be grouped into two cohorts, one beginning in fall and one in spring. Participants are strongly recommended to attend classes where they will receive education and guidance on water-wise landscape principles, designs, and installation techniques from Aurora Water Conservation staff. The following table outlines the deadlines for each cohort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall Cohort</th>
<th>Spring Cohort</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application Submission Period</td>
<td>Sept. 1 to Nov. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Install Deadline</td>
<td>July 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 1 to July 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Customers can submit online applications during the periods listed in the table above to participate in their chosen cohort. Applications will only be available during the submission timelines listed above.

Participants will need to submit their project designs for approval before starting their project and have the project installed by the deadlines outlined in the table above for their specific cohort.
Classes

Once approved to participate, customers may participate in the following classes to learn the basics of water-wise landscaping and how to install their project. All classes are free.

- **Water-wise Landscape Design** - A two-hour, workshop-style class where attendees will create their design and plant list.
- **Introduction to Water-wise Landscaping** - This class focuses on the principles of water-wise landscapes.
- **Installing Your Water-wise Landscape** - This class focuses on the requirements and best practices for installation.

For more information or to sign up go to the [education page](#) on our website.

Rebate Framework

The GRIP rebate is paid out over two years, allowing us to ensure that the new landscape is being watered appropriately and the conversion reduced outdoor water consumption. Below are further details and expectations regarding the rebate framework.

- Uses no- and low-water use plant material
- Incorporates a hardscape feature
- Maximum rebate of $4,000
  - Up to $1,000 may be used for labor costs, delivery fees, tool rentals or disposal costs.
- Payment schedule:
  1. 65% of rebate value paid after completing the project and providing all necessary paperwork.
  2. 35% of rebate value paid after one full growing season (April through Oct.), pending realized water savings. Realized water savings is demonstrated through the water use analysis and outdoor use ≤ 110% of Recommended Water Use (RWU) per [Know Your Flow (KYP)](#) program.

### Calculating Your Rebate

The GRIP will cover all pre-tax material costs according to the approved plan, up to the program maximum limit, as well as up to $1,000 toward installation costs.

**Material costs include:**

- Plants
- Rocks
- Mulch
- Soil
- Sand
- Soil amendments
- Edging
- Fabric
- Landscape pins
- Boulders
- Concrete masonry units
- Retaining wall blocks
- Strip stone used within the approved project area
- Irrigation materials
- Construction of patios/sidewalks/driveway extensions
- Edging or other materials to keep organic or inorganic mulch off driveways or sidewalks
- Rain barrels
- Materials for rain gutters

Installation costs include costs associated with installation of any kind, delivery fees, fuel surcharges, fuel or taxes; fees associated with surveying, permits or licenses; tools rented or purchased.

**Excluded items include:**

- Please note: irrigation materials are not covered under the GRIP, but certain items (drip conversion, rain sensors, smart irrigation controllers, etc.) may be covered with an irrigation rebate.

**Final rebate values will be based on the itemized receipts for materials approved at the time of project completion.** Submission of receipts for materials added after project completion will not be accepted and may disqualify the landscape from receiving future rebate payments.

As indicated, if outdoor water consumption for the property is not less than or equal to 110% of RWU, the rebate payment for that year will be forfeited and is not eligible to recoup in future years.

These lists are not comprehensive. The program manager has jurisdiction regarding items covered and not covered.

GRIP
1. Sign in to the customer portal. If you have not, register your profile in the customer portal and link your water account to your profile once registered.

2. Fill out the GRIP Application within the specific cohort submission period, uploading three to five high-quality photos of the proposed project area. You will receive an email confirming your successful application submission. *Please be sure to check your spam/junk folders as customer portal emails may end up there.

3. You will be notified via email whether you are eligible or not to participate in GRIP. Approval to participate in the program is required prior to starting project.

4. Once your property is verified as eligible, and your design has been approved, upload your design and plant list files to your application in the customer portal. You will be notified of design and plant list approval via email through the customer portal. If the program manager has requested changes, re-submit the updated design and plant list to you application and notify staff through the portal. Obtain any additional/necessary approvals and permits through the City prior to beginning your project.

5. Obtain prior approvals if you live in a covenant-controlled community before proceeding with your project. Be aware that Colorado law prevents a community from banning the installation of water-wise landscapes (State Senate Bill 13-183; City Ordinance Sec. 146-1452).

6. Once all design and plant list approvals are obtained, complete the installation steps for the initial inspection, but do not install the mulch. Consult the program manager if the installation process includes the “smother” method of lawn removal.

7. Once you have completed the steps for the initial inspection, update your application in the customer portal. You will be notified via email when your initial inspection has been scheduled.

8. After initial inspection approval, complete the steps for project completion.

9. Upload five photos to your application of your landscape displaying appropriate mulch installation and final project completion. A physical inspection may be needed per program manager’s discretion. You will be notified via email if your project has met the project completion requirements.

10. Upload itemized receipts and/or invoices and your completed W-9 form (https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf) to the application in the customer portal by the install deadline for your cohort. Be sure to monitor your water usage to obtain the second rebate payment.

**Know Your Flow**

All program participants must enroll in the Know Your Flow (KYF) program if they are not already participating. This program provides free monthly emails that help you evaluate indoor and outdoor water use and compare it to the recommended water use customized for your property. It will also help you understand your eligibility for rebate payments dependent on demonstrated water reductions. Customers who track their usage through KYF will find it easier to make necessary scheduling adjustments to help ensure receipt of rebate payments.

For more information about the KYF program and to enroll in the program, visit the program website here.

**Overview of Steps**

1. Sign in to the customer portal. If you have not, register your profile in the customer portal and link your water account to your profile once registered.

2. Fill out the GRIP Application within the specific cohort submission period, uploading three to five high-quality photos of the proposed project area. You will receive an email confirming your successful application submission. *Please be sure to check your spam/junk folders as customer portal emails may end up there.

3. You will be notified via email whether you are eligible or not to participate in GRIP. Approval to participate in the program is required prior to starting project.

4. Once your property is verified as eligible, and your design has been approved, upload your design and plant list files to your application in the customer portal. You will be notified of design and plant list approval via email through the customer portal. If the program manager has requested changes, re-submit the updated design and plant list to you application and notify staff through the portal. Obtain any additional/necessary approvals and permits through the City prior to beginning your project.

5. Obtain prior approvals if you live in a covenant-controlled community before proceeding with your project. Be aware that Colorado law prevents a community from banning the installation of water-wise landscapes (State Senate Bill 13-183; City Ordinance Sec. 146-1452).
**Landscape Designs**

All participants must have a landscape design approved by the GRIP manager prior to beginning demolition or installation. Designs may be obtained through the program’s design class, our free Landscape Design Program or from a hired contractor/landscape designer. All designs must adhere to the following requirements:

- Design is drawn to scale (see page 8)
  - Acceptable scales: 1":8’, 1":10’ or 1":16’
- Design legend must contain:
  - Customer name
  - Property address
  - North arrow
  - Graphical scale
  - Numerical scale
- Plants must be depicted at a minimum 75% of their mature size (see page 5)
- Design must label:
  - All plants, both new and existing (label as “ex.” for existing)
  - Hardscapes and important landscape features (see page 6)
  - Mulch types (see page 11)
  - Remaining turf and/or bed areas
  - Traffic control devices or signs
  - Utility boxes or meters

**Note:** The Public Works Traffic Division will review designs for corner lots to ensure landscape features do not obstruct sight visibility for adjacent roadways per the city of Aurora Roadway Design and Construction Specifications. Designs created by a hired contractor/landscape designer must abide by plant specifications per the site triangle regulations, which pertain to visibility within roadway intersections.

**Initial Inspection**

The initial inspection provides an opportunity to ask questions and address any installation issues. It should be scheduled after the plants, irrigation (if applicable), soil amendments and hardscapes have been installed, but before the mulch goes down. The following is inspected:

- Plant type/size matches the plant list, and plant locations match the landscape design
- Plant holes are dug double wide with appropriate backfill of soil around plant
- Use of approved soil amendment
- Irrigation system including backflow prevention device and rain sensor are installed (if applicable)
- Site is free of weeds and hazards
- Edging is present to separate beds from turf sections (if applicable)
- Erosion control BMPs in place where needed and public right-of-ways are clean

If issues are still present at the end of the initial inspection, an additional inspection may be required.
Project Completion

After passing your initial inspection, you should apply the mulch according to your design at least 3” deep across the project. In addition to mulch application, ensure the items below meet the requirements of project completion. Once met, upload five photos that accurately display mulch appropriately installed on the landscape and the completed project. A physical inspection may be required and is subject to the program manager’s discretion. Additional information for projection completion will be in the required classes. The following items will be assessed from the photos:

- Plants are healthy
- There is at least 3” of mulch coverage over the landscape
- Landscape fabric is not visible
- Irrigation lines are covered with mulch so that none are visible
- Edging, if used, extends a maximum of ½” above surrounding material
- Edging that terminates at driveway or sidewalk is not sticking above grade
- Site is weed-free and looks like a completed project

Upload all eligible itemized receipts or invoices to the application in the customer portal. You will be notified via email when the rebate has been processed and approved. After meeting the project completion requirements, no additional materials will be permitted for rebate consideration.

Monitoring Outdoor Water Usage

It is important to efficiently water to ensure plant health and to keep the property on track to receive the second payment.

The KYF program emails will provide monthly water consumption data for your property. These communications also provide information to evaluate water use and the recommended water use customized for the property. It is important to keep track of water use efficiency for your property.

To receive additional rebate payments, the property’s recommended water use (RWU) must be less than or equal to 110% for the growing season (April–October). If the property is over the 110% RWU, the rebate payment is forfeited for that year and is not eligible to recoup in future years.

If you experience any type of incident or change in your landscape that will impact the property’s water use efficiency for the growing season, please contact the GRIP manager.
Design Example
This design includes all requirements listed in the previous section. Important elements have been identified in red.
**Plant List for Design**

The plant list is a separate document that identifies all the plants included in the project. It connects all the plant symbols on the design with the plant names and water requirements. A downloadable “Plant List Calculator” is available on the GRIP webpage. It is an Excel spreadsheet with common low-water use plants. This is the exact plant calculator that is used in the free landscape design class. Participants must submit a plant list using the “Plant List Calculator” template. The final product will look like this:

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For GRIP, a front yard project must meet or exceed 50% plant coverage. Trees are not included in the coverage calculations. The coverage requirements are determined using predefined plant sizes within the plant calculator. Two separate plant lists must be submitted for the main front yard and the curbside landscape (area between sidewalk and road), each meeting the 50% plant coverage requirement.

If plants need to be substituted, the program manager will provide a list of suitable options. If plants on the substitute plant list cannot be found, please contact the program manager for additional recommendations.

The purchase size of the plant is also important. Perennials and ornamental grasses must be at least a #1 (1-gallon) pot, while shrubs must be at least a #5 (5-gallon) pot per the city’s Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) requirements. If you are having trouble finding these sizes, please discuss them with program manager.

Artificial turf may replace natural turf areas. The UDO classifies it as turf and as such it must be installed in accordance with all city requirements and regulations, which includes minimum and maximum amounts based on lot size. **Artificial turf is not eligible for a rebate and will not count toward the minimum project size of 500 square feet.**

If you plan to install water-wise or native grass in place of Kentucky bluegrass, the installation and inspection process will vary slightly, as outlined in this manual. Please discuss this with the program manager.
Hardscape Requirement

The UDO and GRIP requirements dictate that all areas visible to the public include a hardscape feature that provides year-long visual interest. Projects only converting grass in the tree lawn or curbside landscaping are exempt from including hardscape features. There are three options to choose from to meet the hardscape requirement.

1. Berm – Minimum 18” high, no more than 2’ 5” high at center, and no more than 1:4 slope on all sides

2. Boulders – Minimum of 3 that are at least 2’ x 2’ x 2’

3. Small wall – Stone or masonry, must be 1 – 2.5’ tall
Mulch Requirements

Mulch is an important part of a water-wise landscape, as it helps the landscape retain soil moisture while mitigating weed growth. Choices include organic mulch (i.e. wood or bark) or inorganic mulch (i.e. river rock or cobble). Here are some examples of mulch:

- Mulch must be at least 3” deep
- Weed barrier/landscape fabric underneath organic mulch is an option, though not typically recommended around plant material because of the unnatural barrier that is created between mulch and soil. The UDO requires fabric installed under inorganic mulch
- At least two mulch types are required by the UDO, e.g., a combination of river rock and golden small chip, or shredded bark with golden small chip
- The UDO mandates that inorganic mulch (rock) may not be used in more than 50% of the landscapable area; the rest would need to be covered by organic mulch (wood)
- There is no limit to the use of organic mulch
- Pea gravel may be used, but not next to pedestrian access points (sidewalks, streets, etc.)
- Red mulch, lava rock and recycled products such as ground rubber or crushed concrete may NOT be used
- Be creative with colors and textures, but sensitive to neighborhood aesthetics

**ORGANIC - GOLDEN SMALL CHIP**

**INORGANIC - 3” RIVER ROCK**

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