

ARBOR LANDSCAPING STANDARDS

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Vision

The Arbor’s vision is to create a sustainable landscape¹ that is both attractive and in balance with the local climate and environment and minimizes maintenance and cost.

Standards to Achieve That Vision

As landscape practices change over time, the Standards should be reviewed every five years to ensure they are current.

Grass Standards

- Use grass seed with clover seeds added.

Why this is important: Adding about 5% clover seeds to grass seed mixtures is beneficial, as this amount works well with other grasses and helps improve soil health by fixing nitrogen. This small percentage can significantly enhance the lawn's resilience and biodiversity.

¹Sustainable landscaping is an approach that balances attractiveness with the local climate and environmental requirements and builds landscape resilience. Key principles include maintaining soil health, implementing water conservation practices, enhancing biodiversity, integrating natural pest management, and implementing cost efficient designs that minimize maintenance, resource use and negative environmental impact.

- **Mower height is set at four inches.**

Why this is important: Setting the mower at four inches promotes a healthier lawn by allowing the grass to develop a larger root system, which helps it withstand drought and compete against weeds. Additionally, taller grass blades can better absorb sunlight, leading to a more robust and lush lawn.

- **Grass clippings are left on the lawn.**

Why this is important: Leaving grass clippings on the lawn provides essential nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, acting as a natural fertilizer. This practice, known as "grasscycling," can also save time and reduce the need for additional fertilizers while promoting a healthier lawn.

- **Alternative plants, such as sedges or native violets are used where grass will not grow.**

Why this is important: Violets in lawns, particularly wild violets are beneficial as they thrive in shady, moist areas (which would otherwise be bare), provide food to support the survival of pollinators, and can enhance the beauty of the landscape. Sedges are excellent alternatives to grass in shady areas as they are shade-tolerant and can create a lush, grassy appearance while requiring less maintenance. They blend well with traditional lawns and are suitable for areas where turf grass struggles to grow.

Herbicide/Pesticide Use Standards

- **Integrated Pest Management² is used as guidance for the use of herbicides/pesticides.**

Why this is important: IPM prioritizes use of the least toxic pest³ control, beginning with cultural controls (making sure growing conditions support healthy plants), mechanical controls (e.g., manual removal), biological controls, and last, conventional herbicides/pesticides. This method is effective in managing pest population⁴ while minimizing risk to human health and the environment. The best practices that keep lawn and landscape plants healthy contribute to effective pest control because healthy trees and plants are more resistant to pests and disease.

² Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on a combination of common-sense practices. IPM programs use current, comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment. This information, in combination with available pest control methods, is used to manage pest damage by the most economical means, and with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment. (EPA definition).

³ Pests includes insects (such as the spotted lantern fly), weeds, and other living organisms requiring control.

⁴ In the past, herbicides were used to kill clover and violets. Herbicides should not be used on clover and violets which are beneficial plants.

- **Invasive ephemeral plants (such as Lesser Celandine⁵) are addressed early.**
Why this is important: Addressing these plants early (late March to April) is critical because they emerge before native plants and form dense, sunlight-blocking mats. Early control prevents the spread of their underground tubers and bulbs, and disrupts their rapid growth cycle. Because it goes dormant by late spring, there is only a narrow, early-season window to identify and remove it before it disappears underground leaving behind large patches of bare soil.

Tree Standards

- **A tree survey is done every five years⁶.**
Why this is important: Regular tree surveys are essential to help protect the public by identifying hazardous, diseased, or structurally unstable trees before they cause injury or property damage. These inspections fulfill legal duty-of-care obligations (demonstrates proactive management, which is often required by law to avoid liability if a tree fails), reduce liability risks (identify broken limbs, decay, or unstable roots that could damage buildings, vehicles, or people), and allow for early detection of pests or diseases (this can prevent the spread to other trees). They also support proactive maintenance and tree longevity (this protects mature trees that enhance property value).
- **The company that does the survey performs an Arbor tree inspection every two to three years (in between surveys) to catch any developing problems.**
Why this is important: Having an arborist inspect mature trees near buildings and high-traffic areas is crucial for identifying potential hazards, such as structural defects or disease, that could lead to tree failure and cause injury or property damage. Regular inspections help ensure the safety of people and property while maintaining the health of the trees.
- **Every year the General Manager, with assistance from the Landscape Committee, inspects the trees to identify new problems.**
Why this is important: Because trees are not static, yearly inspections are needed to identify and address new problems that may need immediate attention to help protect people and property while maintaining the health of the trees.

⁵ Lesser celandine is an invasive perennial plant with yellow flowers and kidney shaped leaves which appears in early spring. Lesser celandine has been found growing in the Arbor's lawn and some patios. At present the best way to address lesser celandine is to manually remove it by hand-pulling or using a weeding tool, ensuring all tubers are removed, especially when the soil is damp. For larger infestations, applying a glyphosate-based herbicide in early spring can be effective, but caution needs to be used to avoid harming surrounding plants.

⁶ By using the same tree company, the original tree survey can be updated five years later, without incurring the cost of an entirely new survey. The Arbor should stipulate that the survey be completed by a certified arborist.

- **A five-year tree maintenance plan⁷ is developed and implemented following each tree survey.**

Why this is important: A tree maintenance plan is vital for ensuring the health and longevity of trees and for preventing diseases and hazards that could damage property or pose safety risks. Regular care, such as pruning and watering, enhances the aesthetic appeal of landscapes and offers environmental benefits.

- **For any tree that is not diseased or where there is no imminent risks involved, an arborist's input is obtained and the concurrence of the Board majority is obtained before cutting it down.**

Why this is important: Trees play an essential role in the ecosystem, providing oxygen, shade, and habitat for countless species of plants and animals. Anytime a tree is cut down for non-essential reasons, it negatively impacts the health of the Arbor's tree canopy and results in additional down-range financial and resource costs.

- **The Arbor requests trees from the Arlington Tree Canopy Fund⁸ for a fall planting.**

Why is this important: The Tree Canopy Fund is a free source of sustainable trees that reduce the cost of Arbor tree canopy maintenance. To help ensure the survival and health of the new tree, fall is considered to be the best time to plant a tree in a hot climate because cooler temperatures and seasonal rain help the roots establish before the heat of summer returns.

- **When a new tree is planted, a watering plan is established for the first two years.**

Why this is important: Newly planted trees need to be watered regularly for the first two years to help establish their roots. During this time, they typically require about 10 to 30 gallons of water each week, especially in dry conditions. Helping trees get established increases their longevity and reduces the cost of maintaining a healthy tree canopy.

- **Mulch is applied around the base of trees using the "donut mulching method."⁹**

Why this is important: Applying a layer of organic mulch around the tree helps retain soil moisture, regulate soil temperature, and reduce weed competition.

⁷ The tree maintenance plan, using information from the tree survey, outlines the strategy for pruning, replacing trees that are dying and diseased, and planting new trees to maintain or enhance the local environment. This plan often includes details such as the number of trees to be planted and the species to be used, aiming to preserve the area's tree canopy and ecological balance. New trees can better absorb carbon dioxide and provide essential habitat for wildlife and the care for mature trees provide better shade, cooling, and stormwater management.

⁸ Fall applications for the Arlington Tree Canopy Fund are due in June.

⁹ Donut mulching is a method of applying a 2-3-inch-thick ring of mulch around a tree, leaving a 3-6-inch gap between the mulch and the trunk to expose the root flare. To avoid rot and disease, the mulch is kept a few inches away from the trunk. This is in contrast to "volcano mulching", which mounds mulch up against the trunk.

- **Rocks/stones are not used around the base of trees.**

Why this is important: Rocks/stones absorb heat and can raise the temperature around the tree, causing additional moisture loss and stressing the tree.

Individual Court Landscaping Renovation Standards

- **Court renovations are a refresh of the landscape by selective removal and additions of shrubs/plants.**

Why this is important: The Arbor has a lot of sustainable and native plants and shrubs that have aesthetic and financial value. By focusing on enhancing these outdoor spaces through selective removal and additions, the Arbor increases their aesthetic appeal, functionality, and property value while limiting the cost of such work as compared to a complete redo where all of the plant material is removed and new plants/shrubs are planted.

- **New shrubs added in a court renovations are planted in the fall.**

Why this is important: The best time to plant new shrubs in a hot climate is during the fall, as the cooler temperatures and increased moisture help establish strong root systems before the heat of summer. This approach increases the probability that a new shrub survives and thrives, reducing costs associated with additional labor and shrub replacement.

- **When a new shrub is planted, a watering plan is established for the first two years.**

Why this is important: Newly planted shrubs typically need to be watered regularly for the first two years to help establish their root systems. This ensures they receive adequate moisture until they can survive on rainfall alone.

- **Any shrubs/plants on either the Arlington or Alexandria Invasive Plant List¹⁰ are removed from the courts during court renovations.¹¹**

Why this is important: Invasive non-native shrubs and plants harm local ecosystems

¹⁰ Both Arlington (Nonnative Invasive Plants of Arlington, County, Virginia) and Alexandria (Non-Native Invasive Plants of the City of Alexandria Virginia) maintain their own lists of nonnative invasive plants found in their respective boundaries. These lists are updated and monitored by their staff.

¹¹ Because the Arbor has a fair number of such plants it may take several years to achieve this standard. As such the process should start with plants that are easiest to remove and not contained and/or by selecting one or two species per year to remove. For example English ivy, lesser Celandine, and honey suckle could be among the first to be addressed. Species that are contained and controlled could be among the last, for example the bamboo around the pool.

by outcompeting native species, reducing biodiversity, and disrupting food webs¹². They can also negatively impact human health¹³ and cause economic losses¹⁴.

- **Rejuvenation pruning is applied to existing overgrown shrubs that respond well to this type of pruning during a court renovation.**

Why this is important: Rejuvenating overgrown mature shrubs encourages new growth, improves their overall health and longevity, and enhances their appearance by removing dead or damaged branches. This process can also increase flower production and control pests by removing older, less productive wood that can harbor insects and disease.

- **The selection of new shrubs for the court gives primary consideration to the location where it will be placed, the amount of space it will have to grow, and how drought tolerant it is.**

Why this is important: Selecting shrubs that are appropriate for the size of the location can help prevent the need for excessive pruning, as it reduces the likelihood of the plants outgrowing their space both in height and width. Choosing smaller or slower-growing varieties can maintain the intended landscape design without frequent maintenance, thus reducing cost. Choosing shrubs that are drought tolerant is very important to the resilience of the shrub as the summers have become hotter and dryer.

Plant¹⁵ Selection and Removal Standards

- **Primary consideration is given to plants that are native to the Mid-Atlantic region and that are drought tolerant.**

Why this is important: Selecting plants¹⁶ native to the local area supports local wildlife, as they provide the right food and habitat for birds, butterflies, and other pollinators. These plants are adapted to local climate and soil conditions, requiring less water and maintenance once established, which saves time, resources, and money.

¹²Food web is a complex network of interconnecting and overlapping food chains showing feeding relationship within a community. For example, caterpillars need native plants for food, baby birds primarily eat only caterpillars. Remove the native plants and there is no food for the caterpillar or the baby birds which affects the entire food web.

¹³ The amur honeysuckle and autumn olive (both found in northern Virginia), provide ideal conditions for mosquito breeding. These plants can enhance the abundance of *Culex pipiens* mosquitoes, which are known carriers of West Nile virus.

¹⁴ The tree of heaven, which is found in Fairlington is the preferred host plant for the spotted lanternfly. The spotted lanternfly causes significant damage by feeding on the sap of over 70 plant species, including crops like grapes and apples, which can lead to wilting, leaf curling, and even death of the plants and causing economy damages.

¹⁵ Plants refers to both herbaceous (annuals, biennials, perennials, or grasses) and woody plants (trees, shrubs, and vines).

¹⁶ The Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia maintain up to date easy to use lists and information about Northern Virginia native plants on the web. There are lists of plants by the conditions of the location such as sunny or shade, wet or dry.

- **Any species on the Arlington or Alexandria nonnative invasive plant list is not allowed to be planted in the Arbor.**

Why this is important: Invasive nonnative species¹⁷ alter the native ecosystem and disrupt biodiversity which is needed to support local wildlife. These species have unfair advantages over native plants because they can thrive in new environments without the natural pests (such as insects) and diseases that affect native species allowing them to grow more vigorously and overrun the landscape and gardens. This results in more maintenance costs to control.

- **Any species of shrub, plant, or vine on the Arlington or Alexandria nonnative invasive plant list growing in the Arbor (including patios) is removed.**

Why this is important: Nonnative invasive plants have escaped gardens and have spread from residents' patios into other parts of the Arbor's landscape. These species can cause damage to existing plants and buildings. English ivy is an example, it spreads rapidly by both vegetative growth and birds that distribute its seed. English ivy can kill trees because it promotes fungal rot and its roots can penetrate bark and introduce insects and diseases. It can also damage buildings because the roots attach themselves to cracks in the masonry. It is extremely difficult to eradicate and can cause costly damage to Arbor buildings.

Pruning Standards

- **Shrubs are pruned on a schedule and in a manner suited to the needs of the specific shrub species.**

Why this is important: Pruning shrubs at the right time is crucial to avoid disrupting their blooming cycle, as some shrubs flower on old wood while others flower on new wood. Pruning at the appropriate time helps ensure healthy growth and maximizes flowering potential for the following season. Equally important is pruning in the correct manner for each species — the wrong technique, such as shearing a shrub that should be selectively hand-pruned, can damage its natural form, reduce flowering, create entry points for disease, and result in dense outer growth that starves the interior of light. Matching both the timing and the technique to the specific shrub produces a healthier, longer-lived plant and reduces the likelihood of costly remediation down the road.

- **Existing overgrown shrubs undergo rejuvenation pruning¹⁸ on a designated schedule of every three to five years based on the growth of the shrub.**

Why this is important: Rejuvenation pruning, which reduces plant size by 30 to 50 percent, exposes latent buds along the lower portion of stems to sunlight so they will grow new shoots and leaves, resulting in a healthier, denser, and a more attractive shrub. When shrubs are crowded, they look misshapen, produce few flowers, and/or

¹⁷ Not all nonnative species are invasive for example most of the azaleas and roses are not native. English ivy and burning bushes are invasive nonnative plants.

¹⁸Rejuvenation pruning is effective for various deciduous shrubs, particularly those that have multiple stems.

have a bare interior. Regular pruning in this situation is not enough to correct these problems.

- **Trees are pruned on a schedule designated by an arborist.**

Why this is important: There are specific times when the trees' vulnerability to environmental stress is reduced. By pruning at that time, strong regrowth can be encouraged resulting in a healthier and more attractive tree.

Visual Standards

- **Shrubs are planted far enough from sidewalks, structures, and property boundaries that they will not encroach on those features at mature size.**

Why this is important: Shrubs planted too close must be repeatedly cut back to keep clearance, creating labor cost and unsightly stubs. Planting at the correct setback from the start eliminates this ongoing cycle entirely.

- **Shrubs are selected so that their natural mature form matches the space they occupy, requiring no routine shearing to maintain their shape.**

Why this is important: Formal shearing is one of the highest labor inputs in landscape maintenance. Selecting a naturally compact or mounding species for a given space eliminates shearing labor and allows the plant to express its healthiest form.

- **Trees are planted at a distance from all buildings to minimize branches overhanging roofs and gutters.**

Why this is important: Overhanging branches create several compounding problems — they abrade roofing materials during wind, deposit debris that clog gutters, trap moisture, and provide a direct pathway for pests and rodents to access the structure. Corrective pruning to maintain clearance is expensive, must be repeated indefinitely, and forces cuts that compromise the tree's natural structure and long-term health.

- **Trees are placed to provide meaningful shade to structures, paved areas, or outdoor activity areas during summer months.**

Why this is important: Strategically placed shade trees reduce surface temperatures on pavement and building exteriors, lower cooling loads on buildings, and create more comfortable outdoor spaces — all without any ongoing energy or maintenance cost.

- **Turfgrass is limited to areas with a functional purpose; ornamental or native groundcovers are used in areas where turf serves no active-use function.**

Why this is important: Turfgrass requires more care (ex. water, fertilizer, mowing) than nearly any other landscape element. Limiting it to areas where it is genuinely needed — and replacing decorative turf with low-maintenance groundcovers — reduces all of these inputs substantially.

- **Plant species known to produce excessive litter — seed pods, fruit, or seasonal debris — in high-use or paved areas are not installed in those locations.**

Why this is important: Litter-producing plants adjacent to sidewalks, parking areas, or entrances generate recurring cleanup labor. Matching plant selection to context eliminates this maintenance burden.

Fall Leaf Removal and Spring Clean Up/Mulching Standards

- **In the fall leaves are left in the foundation beds and community gardens.**
Why this is important: Leaving leaves on the ground over winter provides natural mulch that helps regulate soil temperature, retains moisture, and enriches the soil as the leaves decompose. Additionally, they create habitats for beneficial wildlife, promoting a healthier ecosystem in the garden.
- **Leaf blowers are not used in foundation beds and community gardens.**
Why this is important: Leaf blowers can remove the topsoil along with the leaves, which exposes the roots of the shrubs which can hinder their ability to absorb water and nutrients, and can be harmful to the soil structure.
- **In the spring a 1-inch layer of mulch is placed on top of the leaves left over the winter.**
Why this is important: Mulching on top of leaves left over the winter, can help improve soil health and suppress weeds.
- **Community beds are not cleaned-up until temperatures consistently reach 50 degrees in the spring.**
Why this is important: The spent flower heads and dead foliage provide winter interest and the flower deadheads provide food for the birds and their stalks provide native bees a place to hibernate over the winter. Cleaning-up flower beds before temperatures consistently reach 50 degrees can harm beneficial insects and pollinators that overwinter in the debris. Waiting allows these insects to emerge safely and supports biodiversity in the landscape.

Mosquito Control Standards

- **Any standing water on the Arbor grounds and patios is eliminated.**
Why this is important: Mosquitoes require water for the first three stages of their life to emerge as an adult mosquito – no water, no mosquitoes. So the first and best strategy to reduce their numbers is to eliminate standing water which must be done every seven days¹⁹.
- **Plastic corrugated down spouts are replaced with metal down spouts.**
Why this is important: Corrugated down spouts hold stagnant water in their ridges, which is ideal for mosquito larvae. Replacing them with smooth down spouts eliminates this standing water.

¹⁹ Mosquito eggs, which are laid in water, need seven to ten days to mature into adults. A tablespoon of water is enough for mosquitoes to breed.

- **Common area drains are checked in early spring and after rain storms for standing water and necessary action²⁰ taken.**
Why this is important: Drains can collect enough stagnant water for mosquitos to breed.

- **Residents are encouraged to locate and weekly dump all standing water²¹ in their patios.**
Why this is important: Weekly dumping of water prevents female mosquitos from laying eggs in water that has collected in bird baths, buckets, pet dishes, kiddie pools, saucers under plants, upturned tarps, upturned tools, and anywhere where there are even small amounts of water.

- **The use of one or two “mosquito buckets”²² per patio to kill mosquitoes at the larvae stage is encouraged and promoted.**
Why this is important: These buckets provide a targeted, non-toxic alternative to chemical fogging, protecting beneficial insects, pets, and water sources. The buckets are an effective eco-friendly pest control solution in reducing mosquito populations by attracting females to lay eggs, which are then killed by a harmless bacterium in the water. Female mosquitoes multiply extremely rapidly by laying between 50 and 500 eggs in multiple broods throughout their lives, often reproducing every 28 hours, depending on environmental conditions.

- **The use of pest companies using aerosol insecticides to spray resident’s patios to control mosquitos is not permitted.**
Why this is important: The use of these companies and insecticides poses significant risks. The tiny particles released can drift into homes, compromising indoor air quality and potentially leading to respiratory issues, particularly for those with asthma. Additionally, the chemical residues can persist long after spraying, increasing long-term exposure for families. Vulnerable populations like children and pets face heightened risks, as they may come into contact with contaminated surfaces, leading to toxicity and neurological problems in pets. Furthermore, these sprays are often ineffective for long-term mosquito control and are broad-spectrum, meaning they kill a wide range of insects leading to negative environmental impacts. They harm local water sources due to runoff and risk damage to outdoor surfaces and furniture.

²⁰ To prevent mosquitoes from breeding in open drains, you can regularly clean the drains to remove debris that can trap water. Smaller drains can have fine mesh screens to cover the openings to prevent female mosquitos access to standing water. Any standing water can be treated with Mosquito Dunks and or Mosquito Bits (which only kills mosquito larvae).

²¹ Where it’s hard to dump water, residents can add Mosquito Dunks or Mosquito Bits. Dunks/Bits kill the larvae but do not harm people, pets, birds or other wildlife.

²² A do it yourself “mosquito bucket” is a non-toxic, highly effective, and inexpensive mosquito control trap. By creating a mixture of water and organic matter, it acts as an irresistible breeding site for female mosquitoes, while a natural bacterium—[Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis](#) (Bti)—in a "[mosquito dunk](#)" kills the larvae before they hatch. To make you fill a bucket (1 gallon or larger) half way with water, add a handful of straw and a Mosquito Dunk. Then you replace the dunk once a month.

Landscape-Related Record Keeping and Communications Standards

- **Records of landscaping decisions and projects are maintained by the General Manager.**

Why this is important: Records provide context of past decisions and can inform decisions related to new projects.

- **Lessons Learned are documented after the completion of large or experimental projects.**

Why this is important: Capturing lessons learned after project completion enables teams to avoid repeating past mistakes, to replicate successful strategies, and to optimize future processes. This practice converts individual project experiences into organizational knowledge, reducing risks, improving efficiency, and saving money.

- **Impacted residents are informed²³ about upcoming projects (such as court renovations, tree removal, rejuvenation pruning, etc.) in their area one to two months before the project is scheduled to begin.**

Why this is important: Such communication fosters transparency and trust between the Board and the residents and it allows residents to voice concerns and provide feedback. Early communication helps residents prepare for potential disruptions, reducing frustration and enhancing overall satisfaction. Finally, early communication encourages engagement and buy-in for these initiatives.

- **The Arbor's Landscape Standards and landscape-related best practices are communicated to residents through a variety of methods including newsletters, the Arbor webpage, bulletin boards, and/or General Manager emails.**

Why this is important: Educating residents about landscaping standards and best practices promotes environmental sustainability, helping to conserve resources like water and reduce chemical usage. It fosters a sense of community pride and cohesion, as well-maintained landscapes enhance property values and neighborhood aesthetics. Additionally, knowledge of sustainable landscaping practices encourages biodiversity and supports local ecosystems, benefiting both residents and the environment.

²³ It is best practice to use both paper notifications left at the resident's unit and electronic notifications. The communication provides details, such as the start date and an explanation of what will be done to avoid surprises for the residents.