

Landscape Conversion Criteria Tool

A Spectrum Approach to Turf Rebate Program Criteria

Tool Description & Purpose: The Conversion Criteria Tool is a matrix structured to help landscape rebate program managers design effective and progressive rebate criteria. The tool presents a spectrum of criteria options that allow program managers flexibility in program design while working towards increasingly sustainable and functional landscape conversions that leverage multi-benefits.¹

The matrix was intended to be flexible:

- 1) Criteria options are organized by landscape category (e.g., water, plants, surfaces, etc.).
- 2) The spectrum provided is a 'menu;' pick and choose the options that best suit your agency.
- 3) Companion information sheets will be provided to help with decision making.

How to Use: Program managers should use the matrix as a tool to inform rebate criteria design. The tool's spectrum of rebate criteria should be used to achieve steps towards advancing not only water savings, but also the many benefits of sustainable landscaping.

Managers should pick and choose from each landscape category as desired. Criteria columns are graduated from 'Initial Steps' to 'Leading Progress' but are not necessarily intended to be adopted wholesale, nor are they dependent on other criteria in the same column for functionality.

Site-specific geography and climate should be weighed carefully when analyzing criteria options. In some cases, there may be regional exceptions to the generally progressive order of criteria from singular benefit → multi benefit.

Caveats & Notes: This tool was designed by the California Urban Water Conservation Council's Landscape Committee. The Committee comprises landscape experts from public, private, and non-profit sectors. Committee participants include water agency program managers, irrigation experts, landscape designers and architects, environmental advocates, horticulturists, ecologists, irrigation equipment manufacturers, environmental regulators, and state agency representatives. The matrix was developed through a consensus-seeking process. All perspectives were considered carefully, though compromise was necessary to create an end product that was useful under current rebate program realities.

The tool is to be used as a guide, and it does not represent any binding legal or regulatory standards.

¹ Sustainable Landscapes following the watershed approach are beautiful, living landscapes that can generate a broad range of benefits that transcend water savings to include: cost, maintenance time, and energy savings; emissions, stormwater and irrigation runoff, greenwaste, and pesticide and herbicide reductions; water quality, wildlife habitat, soil health, and quality of life improvements; proliferation of native and climate-appropriate plants; and urban beautification.

LANDSCAPE CATEGORY	Required Prior to Modification	Initial Steps Water Savings Single Benefit (Minimum Modification)			Advanced Progress	Leading Progress Multi-Benefits (Maximum Potential)	Enforcement or 'Measurement'	NOTES
		Moderate Progress						
Water								
Water Use							Water Budget	
Irrigation Fixtures	Any/not mandatory	High efficiency nozzles & point source emitters	Any micro-irrigation device (e.g., micro-bubbler/spray, drip)	Embedded emitters only (e.g., 0.9 GPH or less)	Self sufficient landscape - requires no supplemental water; no permanent irrigation system permitted	Visual inspection	Drip Irrigation Information Sheet	
Irrigation Controllers	Any/not mandatory	Controller features include % adjustments & multiple start times	WaterSense WBIC or soil moisture sensing feature/device	Controller/system has flow-sensing feature	Hand watering only	Visual inspection	Irrigation Controller Information Sheet	
Water Features (fountains/pools)		Recirculation pump required	Additional volume/surface area restriction		Only utilizes non-potable water supply			
Water Sources								
Potable water	Must be irrigated with potable water to be rebate eligible	Allowed	Allowed	Not Allowed (except vegetable gardens)	Not Allowed (except vegetable gardens)			
Recycled water	On case-by-case basis may eliminate site from rebate eligibility	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Not Allowed		Alternative Sources Info. Sheet	
Rainwater		Allowed	Promoted	Strongly Encouraged	Required		Alternative Sources Info. Sheet	
Graywater		Allowed	Promoted	Promoted	Strongly Encouraged		Alternative Sources Info. Sheet	
Process/On-site recycled water		Allowed	Promoted	Promoted	Strongly Encouraged		Alternative Sources Info. Sheet	
Water Quality								
On-site Retention/Filtration		Allowed	Promoted	Promoted	Required			
Plants								
Plant Selection								
Turfgrass or High Water Use Plants (i.e. seasonal beds)	100% of rebated area, grass must be in place, must show evidence of being watered, but does not need to be green	No remaining turfgrass or high water using plants in rebate eligible area	No remaining turfgrass or high water using plants in rebate eligible area	No remaining turfgrass or high water using plants in rebate eligible area	No remaining turfgrass or high water using plants in rebate eligible area	Visual inspection or area measurement	Plant Selection Information Sheet	
Climate Appropriate Plants*		Not include any live turf, or turf-looking grasses**	Mid/low water using plants (PF<=0.5) WUCOLS= medium or lower	Only low water using plants (PF<=0.3); WUCOLS = low or very low; promote appropriate CA Native	Plants adapted to no supplemental irrigation; strongly encourage geographically-appropriate California native	Visual inspection or WUCOLS, plan review	Plant Selection Information Sheet * No invasive species allowed ** If it looks like turfgrass it is managed like a turfgrass; it is a behavioral issue	
Plant Placement								
Hydrozones		Not required	Encourage hydrozones to relate to PF, rooting, micro-climate, slope, seasonal needs	Require hydrozones based on PF, rooting, micro-climate, slope, seasonal needs, plant community	Hydrozones correspond to alternative water source(s)	Plan review and/or on-site inspection		
Plant Coverage								
% Coverage Requirements**	100% of rebated area	"Some" encouraged; None required when converted via sheet mulch method	At least 25% coverage	At least 50% coverage*	Greater than 50% coverage*	Visual inspection or area measurement	*Depending on topography and geography **Plant coverage denotes coverage at maturity	

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Land							
Soil							
Soil Amendments* (e.g. compost, lime, soil organisms)		Promoted	Strongly encourage compost amendment at a rate of 4cu.yd/1000sq.ft	Encourage amendment implementation based on a soil lab report	Amendment recommendations implemented based on a required soil analysis report	Lab report	Mulch & Compost Info. Sheet Living Soil Information Sheet *Considering species specific and California native plant requirements
Pesticide/Herbicide Use		Allowed	Promote IPM methodology	Encourage non-chemical IPM techniques (cultural, physical, biological)	Require non-chemical IPM techniques (cultural, physical, biological)		Integrated Pest Management Information Sheet, Synthetics Information Sheet
Non-Living Ground Covers							
Mulch (organic)*		Required with a 2-3" layer	Required with a 3-4" layer	Required with a 3-4" layer	Required unless utilizing onsite greencycling	Visual inspection	Greencycling Information Sheet *Considering species specific and California native plant requirements
Rocks, Gravel, etc. (inorganic mulch)		Area must be permeable	Area must be permeable Inorganic mulch constitutes less than 50% coverage of rebated area*	Area must be permeable Inorganic mulch constitutes no more than 20%-30% coverage of rebated area*	Area must be permeable Inorganic mulch constitutes less than 20% coverage of rebated area* (exemptions for desert regions)	Visual inspection	*Depending on topography, geography, and species specific and California native plant requirements
Hardscapes							
Weed Barriers		Permeable material allowed	Natural material encouraged	Natural material required	None allowed		Weed Barrier Information Sheet
Pavers and Spacing		Area must drain into landscape	Pavers used must have > 1/4" spacing	Pavers must be spaced at 50% of paving material	Only "permeable, pervious, or porous" pavers allowed with proper base		Hardscapes & Pavers Information Sheet
Synthetic Turf		Allowed	Allowed, but with strict requirements on types and install (i.e., no rubber pellets, no materials that may leach out, etc.)	Not rebate eligible; if installed in conversion project area, square footage will not count toward rebate	Not rebate eligible; if installed in conversion project area, no rebate will be awarded	Visual inspection	Synthetic Turf Information Sheet
Land-Design Components							
Stormwater Features (e.g., rain gardens, bio-swales, dry streambeds)		Not required	Promoted	Encouraged	Required	Visual inspection	
Removal Method							
Turfgrass removal method		Any method ok - discourage the use of chemicals	No chemical application (scalping, solarization, and sheet-mulching allowed)	No chemical application or scalping (solarization and sheet-mulching allowed)	Sheet-mulching required		Turf Removal Method Information Sheet, Synthetics Information Sheet
Timing		Require removal within a specific number of days	Allow time for sheet-mulching and solarization methods	Encourage replanting based on a geographically-specific season	Replanting based on a geographically-specific season only	Program design	When to Replant Information Sheet