



# Conservation Landscaping Fact Sheet

## What is conservation landscaping?



A conservation landscape is a garden that improves water quality, promotes and preserves native species, and increases wildlife habitat. It can be a native flower garden, a mini urban meadow, a native vegetable garden, a pollinator garden or a rewilded forest patch which takes the place of large turf areas and existing hardscapes. Conservation landscaping means working with nature to create diverse landscapes that help protect clean air and water; enhance climate resilience; support pollinators and wildlife, all while providing a healthier and more aesthetically pleasing environment to residents and their neighbors.



## What are the benefits to property owners and communities?

- ❖ Improved aesthetics
- ❖ Reduced mowing time and cost
- ❖ Reduced chemical pesticide and fertilizer costs
- ❖ Reduced watering time and expense
- ❖ Control over your food supply
- ❖ Erosion control and reduced ponding
- ❖ Increased shade and reduced utility costs
- ❖ Attracting and hosting birds and butterflies
- ❖ Encourages beneficial insects and pollinators

## How can you determine if your property is suitable for conservation landscaping?

Conservation landscapes can be installed nearly anywhere in your yard. They can be designed as native (Track 1) or combined native and edible (Track 2) plant gardens to replace hard surfaces, invasives, eroding soil, or non-native turf grass. Conservation landscapes can also be designed as a forest or meadow (Track 3).

## Qualifying for a rebate

Project	Individual Residence or Individual Members of a Housing Cooperative	Commercial, Homeowner Associations, Condominium Associations, Civic Associations, Multi-Family Dwellings, Nonprofits, Not-for-Profit Organizations, Housing Cooperatives
Conservation Landscaping	\$5 per square foot (250-1,000 square feet minimum, depending on track)	\$5 per square foot (250-1,000 square feet minimum, depending on track)

## What are the costs?

Conservation landscaping costs vary greatly, depending on whether you do it yourself or engage a professional and on the types of native or edible plants and other materials selected. Using a professional designer, contractor, or landscaper will result in higher costs.

## Can you do this project yourself?

Yes. You are not required to hire a contractor, no special skills are involved. A professional designer or qualified contractor may be needed if you have a steep slope or if you are self-installing a native forest or meadow under Track 3 without verifiable professional qualifications.





# Conservation Landscaping

## What is conservation landscaping?

Rain Check participants have three options for installing conservation landscapes in Prince George's County. *Track 1: Native Plant Landscape* is the more traditional track, where turf grass, invasives, eroding soils, or other areas of a property are replaced with plants native to the Mid-Atlantic. *Track 2: Edible Conservation Landscaping* participants can combine non-invasive, edible plants and native plants into a climate-smart landscape. Edible plants can include native edibles and non-native, noninvasive edibles. *Track 3: Reforestation and Meadow Creation* allows participants to "rewild" the urban and suburban landscape to maximize land cover change and ecosystem benefits. Due to the technical nature of Track 3, applicants or their contractors must attend a class before planting. Regardless of the track, conservation landscapes are a beautiful, low-tech, inexpensive way for homeowners, communities, and businesses to create diverse landscapes that enhance climate resilience, support pollinators and wildlife, and help to provide clean air and improve water quality.

## What are the benefits to property owners and communities?

By installing landscapes coordinated with existing site conditions, water resources, and native plant communities, homeowners can participate in stewarding the overall health of their local environment. Conservation landscaping can clean and infiltrate water, enhance climate resilience, provide habitat for pollinators and other wildlife, and reduce household heating and cooling expenses, water consumption, and chemical pesticide use.

### **Reduced landscaping cost while conserving water**

Americans manage more than 30 million acres of lawn and spend \$750 million yearly on grass seed. In managing our yards and gardens, we tend to over-apply products, using 100 million tons of chemical fertilizer and more than 80 million pounds of chemical pesticides annually. The average homeowner spends 40 hours per year behind a power mower, using a quart of gas per hour. Grass clippings consume 25 to 40% of landfill space during a growing season. Small gas-powered engines used for yard care emit more hydrocarbons per hour of operation than a typical automobile. (mowers 10 times as much, string trimmers 21 times, blowers 34 times). To stay green, a yard with 10,000 square feet of turf requires 10,000 gallons of water per summer. Thirty % of water consumed on the East Coast goes to watering lawns.



### **Attracting and hosting beneficial insects**

Many pollinators have become endangered because of a lack of native foliage to feed on. By planting native plants in your yard, you can support these pollinators (and yourself, too!).

**Did you know?** There are 400 species of bees native to Maryland. The honeybee, the most common bee we think of, is NOT endangered! Rather, there are many native bee species that are endangered. Save the (Native) Bees! Don't "bee" afraid of attracting native bees. Native bees do not sting.

### ***Control over your food supply***

Not only can conservation landscaping feed wildlife, but it can also provide fresh, highly nutritious food to supplement the needs of individuals and families. Many fruits and vegetables provide pollen, nectar, and habitat resources to wildlife while producing the components we eat. Many of these plants also support insects used by birds to feed their young. Growing your own food is a rewarding experience that offers an opportunity to deepen your connection with the land you live on.

**Did You Know?** All foods begin to decline in nutritional value as soon as they are harvested, so the most nutritious is what you pick from your own garden!

### ***Reduced chemical pesticide and fertilizer costs***

Native plants are adapted to local climate, rainfall, and soil conditions. As a result, they require less water and no chemical fertilizers or pesticides. A diverse community of plants installed in accordance with existing site conditions will support a balanced ecosystem of flora and fauna that will reduce the potential for overabundance of any one organism.

### ***Reduced ponding and erosion***

The best choices of native plants have deep root systems and “channels” that leave holes under the soil. These channels can reduce flooding by breaking up the soil, allowing water to flow and soak into the ground more quickly. Year by year, these root systems build quality soil as old roots are shed.

**Did You Know?** Even well-maintained turf grass roots are only 6 inches long, but many native plants have roots that can extend up to 16 feet! Larger, longer roots retain more water and are better for erosion control.

## **How can your conservation landscaping garden qualify for a rebate?**

The Rain Check Rebate Program promotes conservation landscaping by offering a rebate of \$5 per square foot to offset the installation cost. Currently, there is a \$6,000 cap for residential properties and a \$20,000 cap for commercial businesses, homeowner associations, condominium associations, civic associations, multi-family dwellings, nonprofits, and not-for-profit organizations. These dollar amounts are the total maximum rebates for any one property. Property owners who complete these plantings and regeneratively maintain their new landscape qualify for a reduction in their annual stormwater fee.

This rebate program reduces stormwater runoff, keeps chemical and nutrient pollutants from entering our waterways, reduces water usage, and increases biodiversity. To qualify for a rebate, the conservation landscape must replace hard surfaces, invasive plants, eroding soil, or non-native turf grass.

Property owners within Prince George’s County, Maryland, are eligible to participate, with the following exception. The City of Bowie manages its stormwater program independently of the County; therefore, properties within the City of Bowie are not eligible.

Three different tracks allow property owners to install landscaping most aligned with their interests and the opportunities their property affords.

- ❖ ***Track 1: Native Plant Landscape*** will appeal to applicants who wish to use an entirely native plant palette in the context of traditional garden design.
- ❖ ***Track 2: Edible Conservation Landscape*** will appeal to applicants who wish to create a garden that provides food resources and enhances habitat.
- ❖ ***Track 3: Reforestation and Meadow Creation*** will appeal to applicants who can steward a relatively large area and would like to manage it as a dynamic plant community rather than a static grouping of plants.

DoE reserves the right to adjust requirements for these tracks as needed.

## Rebate Requirements

### Track 1: Native Plant Landscape

Summary: Hard surfaces, invasive plants, eroding soil, or non-native turf grass are replaced with native plants.

A Native Plant Landscape can serve the same aesthetic functions as a traditional garden, framing an entryway, screening an unpleasant view, or providing a beautiful area for relaxation and entertaining. We encourage intertwined, layered, naturalistic plantings of trees, shrubs, perennials, and ground covers. Plant selection and regenerative maintenance practices can support pollinators and wildlife year-round while sequestering carbon and improving soil health.

An Urban Meadow is a particular type of native landscape. The minimum size is 250 square feet, but 400 square feet is preferred, as it is easier to achieve the plant diversity needed to create a functioning community with a larger space. Perennials are planted within a matrix of native grasses or sedges. A mix of species (some quick to establish and others long-lived) is needed for the meadow to persist.

### Track 1: Native Plant Landscape - Parameters

Minimum Square Footage Converted to Conservation Landscaping	A minimum of 250 square feet must be dedicated to the project. This can be in any combination and can have a capacity totaling 250 square feet.
Location Restrictions	Projects cannot be located within the County Right of Way. Projects in front yards must be bordered with a fence, hedge, edging, or mowed strip.
Installation Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Turf grass and other non-native lawns must be removed before planting to minimize competition between plants.</li> <li>❖ If ground covers are not used, garden beds must be mulched. Leaf mulch is preferred, but shredded hardwood or clean type 3 seedless straw mulch is acceptable.</li> <li>❖ Peat moss as a planting material is not permitted. Peat moss is not a sustainable material, giving off carbon dioxide when harvested.</li> <li>❖ Bird netting over plants is not permitted. Bird netting can accidentally trap and kill bird species. We encourage finding mutualistic ways of protecting your new landscape.</li> </ul>
Required Percentage of Native Species	100% of the designated landscape must be Mid-Atlantic native species to qualify for this track. Native edible plants are counted towards native species. Cultivars/nativars are permitted, but straight species are preferred. Non-native or invasive plants will not be considered.
Plant Density Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Minimum densities are as follows:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Seeding rates will depend upon the species mix and situation (seeding over plugs or straight seeding). Matting or other soil retention techniques are required when seeding.</li> <li>* Plugs: 4 inches bought in trays of 32 or 50, 6 inches on center.</li> <li>* Herbaceous perennial spacing is 2 feet on center for most species. Spacing for large species, grasses, and vigorous spreaders is 4 feet on center.</li> <li>* Miniature shrub spacing is 2 feet on center. Standard shrub spacing is 4-6 feet on center depending on size. Small to medium tree spacing is 10-12 feet on center. Layered beds (i.e., trees, shrubs, and understory) can be planted more closely.</li> <li>* Large trees: Large trees are ideally planted in clusters of three that will grow together. This helps them withstand high winds and storms.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Prohibited Plants	Non-edible, non-native plants or invasive edible plants are not permitted. See references on page 12 for information on invasive plant species.
Required Permissions	Applicant must show proof of HOA approval.

**Track 2: Edible Conservation Landscaping**

Summary: Hard surfaces, invasives, eroding soil, or non-native turf grass are replaced with a combination of native and edible plants.

Edible Conservation Landscaping incorporates edible plantings into native landscaping. Edible plants can include native edibles (e.g., blueberries) and non-native, noninvasive edibles such as asparagus. Native plants that support pollinators and other beneficial insects increase yields and help keep pests in check. Incorporating edible plants, native plants, and edible native plants into your landscape has many rewards. It is a novel way to save money and reduce the carbon footprint of your food.

**Did You Know?** All foods begin to decline in nutritional value as soon as they are harvested, so the most nutritious is what you pick from your own garden!

**Track 2: Edible Conservation Landscaping - Parameters**

Minimum Square Footage Converted to Conservation Landscaping	A minimum of 250 square feet. must be dedicated to the project. This can be in any combination and can have a capacity totaling 250 square feet.
Location Restrictions	Projects cannot be located within the County Right of Way. Projects in front yards must be bordered with a fence, hedge, edging, or mowed strip.
Installation Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Turf grass and other non-native lawns must be removed before planting to minimize competition between plants.</li> <li>❖ If ground cover is not used, garden beds must be mulched. Leaf mulch is preferred, but shredded hardwood or clean type 3 seedless straw mulch is acceptable.</li> <li>❖ Peat moss as a planting material is not permitted. Peat moss is not a sustainable material, giving off carbon dioxide when harvested.</li> <li>❖ Bird netting over plants is not permitted. Bird netting can accidentally trap and kill bird species. We encourage finding mutualistic ways of protecting your new landscape.</li> <li>❖ Edible annual gardens must have a soil cover when not in production.</li> </ul>
Required Percentage of Native Species	At least 75% of the designated conservation landscape must be Mid-Atlantic native species to qualify for this track. (e.g., 75 square feet of vegetable garden must be accompanied by 225 square feet of native plants). Native edible plants are counted towards native species. Cultivars/nativars are permitted, but straight species are preferred. Non-native, non-edible plants or invasive edibles will not be considered.
Plant Density Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Minimum densities are as follows:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Seeding rates will depend upon the species mix and situation (seeding over plugs or straight seeding). Matting or other soil retention techniques are required when seeding.</li> <li>* Plugs: 4 inches bought in trays of 32 or 50, 6 inches on center.</li> <li>* Herbaceous perennial spacing is 2 feet on center for most species. Spacing for large species, grasses, and vigorous spreaders is 4 feet on center.</li> <li>* Miniature shrub spacing is 2 feet on center. Standard shrub spacing is 4-6 feet on center depending on size. Small to medium tree spacing is 10-12 feet on center. Layered beds (i.e., trees, shrubs, and understory) can be planted more closely.</li> <li>* Large trees: Large trees are ideally planted in clusters of three that will grow together. This helps them withstand high winds and storms.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Prohibited Plants	Non-edible, non-native plants or invasive edible plants are not permitted. See references on page 12 for information on invasive plant species.
Required Permissions	Applicant must show proof of HOA approval.

### Track 3: Landscape Restoration: Reforestation and Meadow Creation

Summary: A minimum of 1,000 square feet of hard surfaces, invasives, eroding soil, or non-native turf grass are reforested or converted to meadow.

Reforestation and Meadow Creation “rewilds” the urban and suburban landscape to maximize land cover change and ecosystem benefits. Typically, reforested areas and meadows differ from conventional gardens in having a greater variety of plants and a more layered structure. They are managed as a system or community rather than as individual plants. These are dynamic landscapes, and it is expected that the mix of species will change over time. Nonetheless, these can still be attractive landscape features that look intentional, and as these landscapes mature over time, the benefits they provide continue to increase year by year. Due to this track’s technical nature, applicants must attend a class before planting.

### Track 3: Reforestation and Meadow Creation

Minimum Square Footage Converted to Conservation Landscaping	A minimum of 1,000 sq. feet is required as achieving the plant diversity needed to create a functioning community with a larger space is easier. The square footage for this track must be contiguous.
Location Restrictions	Projects cannot be located within the County Right of Way. Projects in front yards must be bordered with a fence, hedge, edging, or mowed strip.
Installation Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Meadows/forests must replace turf, invasives, impervious cover, or eroding soil with native perennials and/or trees. The transition must be directed to achieve a defined plant community (meadow or forest patch). The restoration must use only native plants. Invasives must be controlled. The property owner and DoE will agree on a restoration plan based on the site and the owner’s goals.</li> <li>❖ Turf grass and other non-native lawns must be removed before planting to minimize competition between plants.</li> <li>❖ If ground cover is not used, garden beds must be mulched. Leaf mulch is preferred, but shredded hardwood mulch or clean type 3 seedless straw mulch is acceptable.</li> <li>❖ The homeowner understands and agrees that meadows and forests are not meticulously maintained and will not use traditional landscaping practices for this project.</li> <li>❖ Both meadows and forests require succession planting, starting with fast-growing species that tolerate disturbance and pave the way for slower-growing, long-lived species.</li> </ul>
Required Percentage of Native Species	100 % of the designated landscape must be made up of native Mid-Atlantic species to qualify. 50-80% of the meadow must be native grasses or sedges. Wildflowers/perennials are planted within the grass or sedge matrix.
Plant Density Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Minimum densities are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Seeding rates will depend upon the species mix and situation (seeding over plugs or straight seeding). Matting or other soil retention techniques are required when seeding.</li> <li>* Plugs: 4 inches bought in trays of 32 or 50, 6 inches on center.</li> <li>* Herbaceous perennial spacing is 2 feet on center for most species. Spacing for large species, grasses, and vigorous spreaders is 4 feet on center.</li> <li>* Miniature shrub spacing is 2 feet on center. Standard shrub spacing is 4-6 feet on center depending on size. Small to medium tree spacing is 10-12 feet on center. Layered beds (i.e., trees, shrubs, and understory) can be planted more closely.</li> <li>* Large trees: Large trees are ideally planted in clusters of three that will grow together. This helps them withstand high winds and storms.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Prohibited Plants	Non-native plants are not permitted. See references on page 12 for information on invasive plant species.
Required Permissions	Applicant must show proof of HOA approval.
Rebate Timing	The rebate will be distributed 24-30 months after installation.

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## How can you determine if your property is suitable for conservation landscaping?

Conservation landscaping is appropriate for a wide range of site conditions. To evaluate whether your property is suitable for a conservation landscaping rebate, begin by assessing the existing opportunities of your site. Are there places on your property where paving, invasive plants, or turfgrass could be replaced with native plants? Are there areas where soil erosion needs to be addressed? Do these areas cumulatively cover at least 250 square feet, or, if you are interested in Track 3, at least 1,000 square feet? (As a conceptual aid, a 15x15 foot area is just under 250 square feet, and a 10x100 area is 1,000 square feet.)

Assess the community context of your property – are there regulations in your community that pertain to your landscape, and how will they affect your installation decisions? Are there utilities overhead or underground that you may need to work around? Are there any easements that cross your property? Consider neighboring gardens and natural areas. Can you use conservation landscaping on your property as a stepping stone to extend those habitats and counter the adverse effects of habitat fragmentation?

Think about how your garden will grow – how will your plantings receive water? Will you be able to provide supplemental water during the establishment period? Do you have enough room for the plantings you envision to grow to their mature size? Are there ways the new garden space can tie into existing features, including stormwater management installations? Can conservation landscaping complement the house and other yard features and be a source of enjoyment?

## Which other techniques work well with conservation landscaping?

Conservation landscaping works well with most other stormwater reduction techniques, such as rain barrels, cisterns, rain gardens, green roofs, tree plantings, permeable pavement, and pavement removal. Capturing and reusing rainwater on your new plants saves you money and is better for the planet. Reusing captured rainwater reduces excess runoff that can overburden our streams and storm drains. For more information about any of these practices, consult the Rain Check Rebate fact sheets available at <https://cbtrust.org/grants/prince-georges-county-rain-check-rebate/>

**Did You Know?** When used to water plants, rainwater provides nitrogen (in the form of nitrates) which is used by plants to produce green leafy foliage.

## What are the costs?

The cost of completing a conservation landscape varies considerably, depending on the square footage converted, the materials used, and who performs the design and installation work. Using a professional designer, contractor, or landscaper will result in higher costs.

Important factors in estimating the cost include (but are not limited to):

- Plant material and mulch/soil amendment costs, which will vary depending on the size of the garden and the size of the nursery stock selected
- Fees for disposal of yard debris, soil, and/or paving materials
- Ease of access to the site and whether heavy machinery will be required
- Duration of construction
- Materials for boundaries (e.g., decorative fencing, edging, stones) and access paths are optional items. They are not considered eligible expenses for the rebate but may be added when arranged separately between the property owner and contractor at the property owner's expense.

## Can you do this project yourself?

Yes. You can do this project yourself under most circumstances. You are not required to hire a contractor; no special skills are involved. A professional designer or qualified contractor may be needed if you have a steep slope, are considering terracing, have many trees (and roots) on your property, or are installing a native forest or meadow under Track 3 and have not attended a class.

## How can you design and install conservation landscaping?

The design process should begin with a site assessment. Before adding conservation landscaping to your yard, it is important to assess your site. You want to preserve beneficial environmental features and add conservation landscaping to create new native features.

### 1. Familiarize yourself with sun exposure on your site.

Orient yourself to the cardinal directions and observe how the sun moves across your property throughout the day. The sun travels across the southern sky from east to west. The eastern morning sun is gentle, whereas the western afternoon sun can be intense. The north side of buildings generally gets much less sun than the southern side. Sun exposure will change with the seasons as the sun's position above the horizon shifts. Water will evaporate and be used by plants more quickly in sunny locations than in shady ones. Plants with showy flowers often require sunny conditions, as they have evolved alongside their pollinators, who need the sun's warmth to function.

Shadier locations, where the soil stays moist longer, are often good areas for plants that are adapted to grow in the forest understory, such as shrubs and ferns.

### 2. Look for opportunities.

Are there opportunities to resolve site issues by installing conservation landscaping? Can it be used to capture stormwater runoff or excess sump-pump discharge? To create privacy or to buffer the noise from a busy street? To establish a boundary or create an outdoor room? Is there a side of your home, or even an A/C unit, that could be better shaded by adding native shrubs or trees? Could an unused slope be transformed into an amenity? Could a thoughtfully placed garden enhance views from inside the home?

### 3. Further analyze potential project locations.

Ensure that the areas you are considering are not within a right-of-way easement. It is not uncommon for road rights-of-ways to extend many feet inward from the curb. If the areas you are considering are in your front yard, imagine how you might create a transitional border to reinforce the visual intentionality of the design. Some examples of transitional borders include a 4-inch mow strip, fence, rocks, logs, or a consistent native hedge. Borders such as these may be helpful along property lines as well.

Measure the areas that you wish to convert to conservation landscaping and ensure that they are at least 250 square feet for Tracks 1 and 2 or 1,000 square feet for Track 3.

Observe how water drains in the proposed project locations. What is the soil like? Is it light and sandy, or is it dense like clay? Is the soil generally dry? Is there standing water after heavy rainfall? If there are already plants growing in the locations, what are they? Which ones are doing well? These observations will aid you in determining which plants to select.

### 4. Select plants and develop a design

The success of your new native landscape depends on whether you select the right plants for the right places in your yard. For best results, residents should choose plants based on the existing conditions on their property. Consider topography, water movement, and shade structures. Choose plants based on their sunlight, soil, and moisture requirements. Our region hosts a diversity of native trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and grasses adapted to various environmental conditions, making beautiful additions to any garden. Develop a layered planting concept that includes at least one ground cover, flowering herbaceous perennial, and shrub species. Group plants in the landscape according to their water and maintenance needs. See additional resources below for various information sources to help you make these decisions.

## 5. Draw out a planting concept to include in your applications.

This can be a legibly hand-drawn outline or a web-based design. The plan should include plant species, number of plants, consideration of plant density, any additional purchased soil amendments, and a spring/summer/fall maintenance outline. All planting plans must include at least one ground cover, flowering herbaceous perennial, and shrub species.

After you apply, a formal project assessment will be conducted to confirm your location, answer any questions, and provide basic support.

### Installation: What techniques can be used to remove turfgrass and invasive plants?

There are several environmentally sustainable ways to remove turfgrass and invasive plants. The common practice of tilling or breaking up the soil damages soil structure, harms micro-organisms, and releases carbon. Practices such as solarization, smothering, and aeration can be used to prepare soil for new plantings without tillage or chemical herbicides. products such as Round-Up is discouraged due to its detrimental effect on soil health and sub-terranean microbial activity, which benefits plant life on the surface.

Solarization uses the sun's heat to kill undesired plants and seeds in the soil. During the summer months, when the sun is plentiful, and temperatures are warmest, a sheet of clear plastic is laid over the area to be cleared. The plastic is then secured to prevent lifting during a breeze. Landscape pins, soil, stones, bricks, wood, or other heavy objects may all be used to keep the plastic in place. The plastic should be allowed to sit undisturbed for at least 6 weeks.

Smothering relies on blocking out the sun to stifle the growth of undesired plants. At its simplest, smothering is done by laying cardboard over the area to be cleared, securing it, and allowing it to sit for at least three months. Adding a layer of mulch on top of the cardboard can help keep it in place and promote decomposition - eventually, the cardboard will break down underneath the mulch. The "Lasagna Method" takes smothering a step further, integrating composting into the process to kill the grass underneath and provide soil conditioning and nutrients to improve the health of the soil. On top of the cardboard, biodegradable material is added in layers and allowed to decompose. Layers include grass clippings, leaves, hardwood mulch, newspaper, shredded non-glossy paper, and uncooked household food waste such as coffee grounds, vegetable peels, and fruit cores. After 6 - 8 weeks, the "lasagna" will have visibly decreased in height. At this point, holes can be dug directly into the material, and new plants can be added.

A hand tool called a lawn aerator can improve the porosity of highly compacted soils by creating deep puncture holes in the soil. This will increase the flow of water and oxygen to roots below the surface. Adding a top-dressing of compost over aerated soil will boost the dispersal of nutrients and help facilitate the development of a healthy soil ecosystem.

In general, adding amendments such as compost will give your new plants a boost. You can learn more about composting at the University of Maryland Extension Home and Garden Information Center:

<https://extension.umd.edu/resource/soil-compost-and-fertilizer-home-garden>

### Installation: What techniques can help make the project a success?

Plan to install the landscaping project during spring or fall, generally from late March to early June and September to the end of November. Planting too early in the spring can cause the soil to be too wet, and growing during mid-summer will require consistent watering for plants to become established. Woody plants may be planted through the winter if the soil is not frozen or saturated.

Protect exposed soil surfaces with mulch while plants are becoming established. Mulching can help retain soil moisture, moderate soil temperature, prevent soil erosion, and suppress weeds. When applying mulch, a depth of 2 inches is recommended. Adding more than 3 inches of mulch can suffocate plants and prevent water and other nutrients from reaching plant roots. Avoid piling mulch directly onto plant stems or tree trunks, as this can cause rot and disease. There are many alternatives to the dyed mulch are commonly sold at nurseries and home improvement stores. Grass clippings, homemade compost, fallen leaves, pine needles (for acid-loving

plants such as blueberries), shredded newspaper and non-glossy junk mail, and shredded or sheet cardboard are all options that are better for the plants, the planet, and your wallet! Native ground cover makes an excellent living mulch that adds to your native plant count. Minimize mowing so that ground cover can flower, for maximum pollinator benefit.

Water the landscaped area weekly during the first growing season and then during dry periods for the first few years to allow plant roots to become established. Once established, Mid-Atlantic native plants will require minimal water and no chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

### How should you choose a contractor?

If you decide to have a contractor design and install your landscape, choose carefully. Ask potential contractors how much experience they have installing conservation landscaping. Experienced contractors should be able to supply references from past clients. Find out if they are insured, bonded, certified, or trained for designing and installing native landscapes by a local jurisdiction, university, or state cooperative extension service. Certified Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professionals (CBLP's) are trained in conservation landscaping. You can find a list of CBLPs at <https://cblpro.org/>. Ask potential contractors to explain what is included in their services, how long it should take to complete the project, and whether their work would be guaranteed. Ask them if large and heavy machinery will be used and, if so, whether noise will be kept to a minimum and in compliance with local laws and regulations. Homeowners should make sure contractors take standard safety measures to prevent soil and root compaction, as well as damage to existing trees and plants. Homeowners are also advised to request a written estimate in advance that includes materials and labor.

### Is a permit required?

No permit is required to install conservation landscaping. However, if installing your garden (on its own or in combination with a concurrent project on your property) results in more than 5,000 square feet and/or 100 cubic yards of earth-moving disturbance (such as grading, cutting, and filling), a permit will be required. Contact the County's Department of Permitting, Inspections & Enforcement for more information: call 331 or visit <https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/1024/Permitting-Inspections-and-Enforcement>. If you belong to a homeowner's association (HOA), you must obtain a letter of approval from your HOA prior to installing a conservation landscape and applying for a rebate.

### Do I need to obtain HOA approval for conservation landscaping?

Yes, HOA approval is required before applying for any rebates through Prince George's County Department of the Environment. For information about allowing naturalization in HOAs view: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2021RS/bills/hb/hb0322T.pdf>.

### What maintenance will be required?

Conservation Landscaping does not require the same kind of maintenance as, for example, a manicured lawn or formal hedge. If plantings and site conditions are well-matched, maintenance should be minimal. Weeding will be required until young plants have filled in the growing space. It is important to be aware of the invasive species that are likely to venture into your garden and to be able to differentiate them from desired plants, especially when both are young or emerging from seed.

To preserve and encourage pollinators in the garden, we strongly caution against preemptively using chemical herbicides and pesticides within your conservation landscape. Chemical herbicides and pesticides are known to have adverse secondary effects on soil invertebrates and pollinator insects. They can also decrease species abundance and soil organism diversity. Research and invest in non-toxic pest controls such as garlic spray, compost teas, and non-chemical control methods whenever possible. Integrate plant combinations that encourage at least 3 beneficial insects that control pests. If you must use chemical pesticides, spot treat only. If you want reduced weeds, please refer to our plant spacing and density guides. It is important to reduce our dependence on chemical pesticides because they seep into our waterways and can also kill beloved pollinators!

**Did You Know?** More than 99% of all insects are either beneficial or neutral to the home gardener.

### Fall Clean-up and over wintering: Leave the Leaves

Everyday garden tasks such as removing fallen leaves and cutting back flower stems are discouraged for

conservation landscaping. Many native species, including amphibians, turtles, and fireflies, depend on fallen leaves and spent perennials as protection from the winter elements. The stems and roots of perennials provide winter shelter for beneficial insects, such as stem-nesting and ground-nesting bees. Flowers allowed to mature and produce seeds provide winter forage for birds, and the stalks of perennials offer places to perch or hide. The stalks also provide a place for snow to settle, creating winter interest for your yard. Consider piling leaves and pruned branches within your new conservation landscape. These can function as shelters for overwintering bees and butterflies and are compostable materials that prepare these areas for spring.

**Did You Know?** If you're worried about introducing new bugs, birds, and animals around your home, you can build and maintain wildlife shelters at the opposite end of your property! Toad homes, birdhouses, and even dead trees, logs, and woodpiles placed away from your home can help deter unwanted insects.

**Waking your Garden up in the Spring: No Mow March**

Let grasses and perennials stand until late spring. Many pollinators remain in hibernation until temperatures are consistently warm for several weeks. If you choose to cut back stems, you can return these materials to your garden bed as mulch or use them to expand your conservation landscape area. The remaining lawn areas should be allowed to grow through March to encourage microbial growth and soil health. Additionally, leaving clippings on the lawn provides water and nutrients to your lawn, and clippings do not cause thatch.

**Watering during dry periods**

Your new plantings will take time to develop roots and become established in their new locations. Supplemental water will be required during the first year of establishment and during dry periods (if more than three weeks pass without rain) for the following two years.

MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE FOR CONSERVATION LANDSCAPING												
Task	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1 - Monitoring												
2 - Pruning (if needed)												
3 - Watering												
4 - Weeding												
5 - Cut Back (perennials/grasses)												
6 - Mulch / Compost												

Required  Required as Necessary

- 1 Remove trash and debris. Check soil moisture, weed growth, and depth of mulch.
- 2 Trim dead, diseased, crossing, or broken branches using clean shears.
- 3 During the establishment period, water is equivalent to 1 inch per week. After the first year of established growth, water during droughts of 10 days or more.
- 4 Hand-pull weeds from April to November. Clean up winter weeds in February/March to prevent seed spread.
- 5 If you cut back your perennials, wait until late spring (consistently warm temperatures).
- 6 For areas without groundcover plants, apply 1 inch of compost or other organic material followed by leaf mulch, shredded hardwood mulch, or clean type 3 seedless straw mulch in April and November.

## For more information

While Prince George's County does not endorse any one method of building or installing conservation landscaping, or any one vendor, the following information is supplied for your consideration.

### ***Information on Conservation Landscaping***

- ❖ [What is Conservation Landscaping? - Blue Water Baltimore](#)
- ❖ [What is Landscape Conservation? - Network for Landscape Conservation](#)
- ❖ [Conservation Landscaping - Reduce Your Stormwater \(allianceforthebay.org\)](#)
- ❖ [What is an Urban Meadow?](#)
- ❖ [Lawn Alternatives | University of Maryland Extension \(umd.edu\)](#)
- ❖ [Wildflower Meadows: Let's Get Real | Larry Weaner Landscape Associates \(lweanerassociates.com\)](#)
- ❖ [How to Plant a Meadow - Northwest Meadowsapces](#)
- ❖ [Forestscaping - 1000 Islands Master Gardeners \(rideau1000islandsmastergardeners.com\)](#)
- ❖ [UMD Extension - Conservation Landscaping Fact Sheet](#)

### ***Information on Beneficials and Pests***

- ❖ [UMD Extension - Outdoor Insects in the Home Landscape](#)
- ❖ [UMD Extension - IPM - Prevent, Identify, and Manage Plant Problems](#)

### ***Information on Native Plants and Pollinators***

- ❖ [Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay - Native Plant Center](#)
- ❖ [Xerces Society - Pollinator Plants - Mid-Atlantic Region](#)
- ❖ [Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center Native Plant Database](#)
- ❖ [Xerces Society - Pollinator Conservation Resources - Mid-Atlantic Region](#)

### ***Sourcing Native Plants***

- ❖ [Maryland Native Plant Society - Regional Native Plant Vendors List](#)

### ***Information on Invasive Plants***

- ❖ [Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health](#)
- ❖ [Maryland Department of Natural Resources - Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas](#)

### ***Do you have specific questions for the Department of the Environment (DOE)?***

In addition to the resources linked above, the Department of the Environment and the Chesapeake Bay Trust (Trust) are available to answer your questions and offer technical assistance for topics such as:

- ❖ Bed prep tips and tricks
- ❖ Determining how many plants you will need based on the required density and for information on how strategic plant spacing can help reduce weeding.
- ❖ Matting or other soil retention techniques
- ❖ Cover crops or mulching ideas
- ❖ Meadow and forest recipes

Please reach out to the Trust if you have questions on these topics.

*For more information, call 410-974-2941 or visit The Chesapeake Bay Trust (cbtrust.org).*