

Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES)

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Zoning Code: Landscaping Requirements

DDES Customer
Information Bulletin #**22****• FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS •**

**Visit the DDES Web site at
www.kingcounty.gov/permits
for more information**

King County DDES has created customer information bulletins to inform the general public about the effect of codes and regulations on their projects. These bulletins are not intended to be complete statements of all laws and rules and should not be used as substitutes for them. If conflicts and questions arise, current codes and regulations are final authority. Because the codes and regulations may be revised or amended at any time, consult King County staff to be sure you understand all requirements before beginning work. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the project meets all requirements of applicable codes and regulations.

For alternate formats, call 206-296-6600.

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This bulletin explains landscaping requirements as presented in Chapter 21A.16 of the King County Code (KCC). Graphic illustrations of the different types of landscaping are included for review. If applicants need information pertaining to water use and irrigation systems, please refer to DDES bulletin 19A, *Zoning Code: Irrigation System Requirements*.

What is the purpose of landscaping requirements?

Landscaping requirements were developed and have evolved over the years because of the many benefits associated with appropriate uses of landscaping within a community. Carefully designed landscaping can preserve the aesthetic character of communities or even improve the aesthetic quality of the built environment. Landscaping can screen undesirable views, interrupt the barren expanse of large parking lots, and relieve the scale of large buildings. Well-chosen landscaping can improve the compatibility between different types or intensities of land uses by providing a visual buffer. It can also deter erosion, promote native wildlife, allow for infiltration of surface water into groundwater resources and reduce the quantity and improve the quality of storm water discharge.

What areas are subject to the landscaping provisions of the Zoning Code?

Except for communication facilities, which are regulated by Chapter 21A.26 of the King County Code, all new development listed in KCC Section 21A.16.030 are subject to landscaping provisions. This includes residential development (single-family or attached/group residences), commercial development, industrial development, institutional development, and/or utility development. [See KCC Chapter 21A.16 for more information.]

Specific landscaping and tree retention provisions for uses established through a Conditional Use Permit (CUP), a Special Use Permit (SUP), or an Urban Planned Development (UPD) Application will be determined during the permit review process.

The location and type of landscaping required for any particular site depends on adjacent zoning and development and on any property-specific, P-suffix, or special district overlay conditions. See Sections 21A.16.050 through 21A.16.080 of the King County Code for specific information about landscaping required for the following:

- Street frontages
- Interior lot lines
- Surface parking areas
- Areas adjacent to freeway right-of-ways.

PLEASE NOTE: The entire text of the [King County Code](http://www.kingcounty.gov/permits) is available via the DDES Web site at www.kingcounty.gov/permits.

Why does the Zoning Code encourage the use of native species in landscaping?

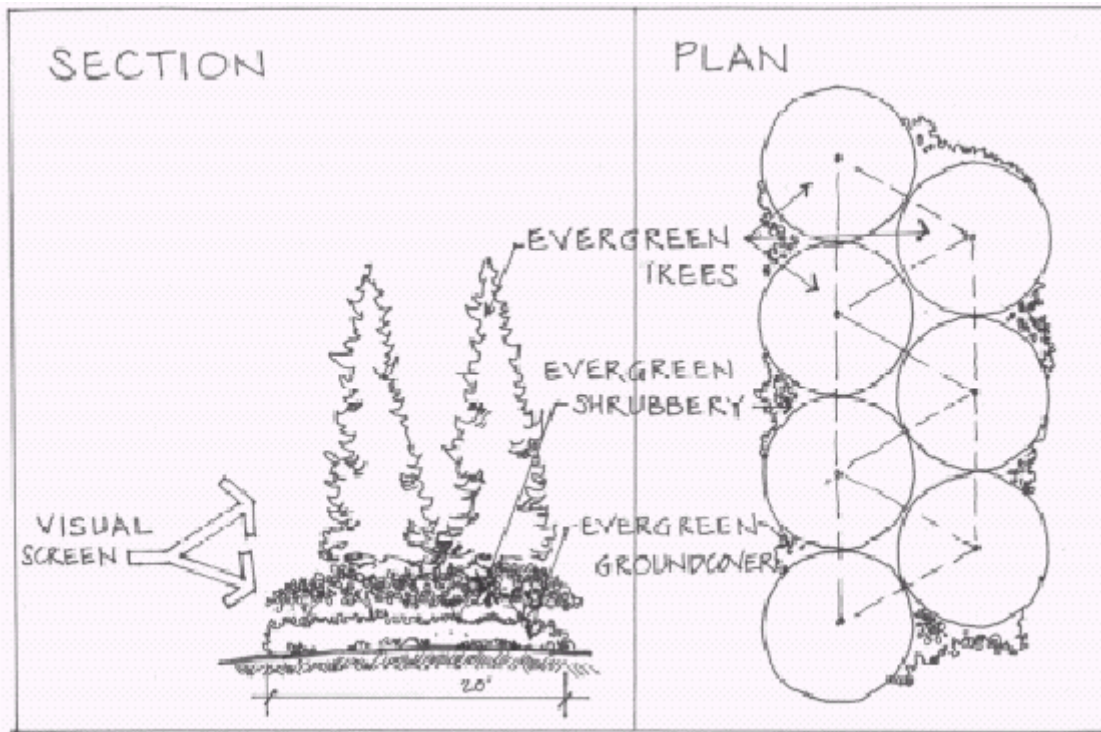
By definition, “native” species refers to those species that have not been introduced to an area recently, but have existed in the area for many centuries. These species usually do not need human intervention to grow or reproduce. Examples of native species include Salal, Oregon Grape, Pacific Madrone, Pine, Wild Rose, Mock Orange, and Huckleberry.

There are several reasons for wanting to retain and plant native species:

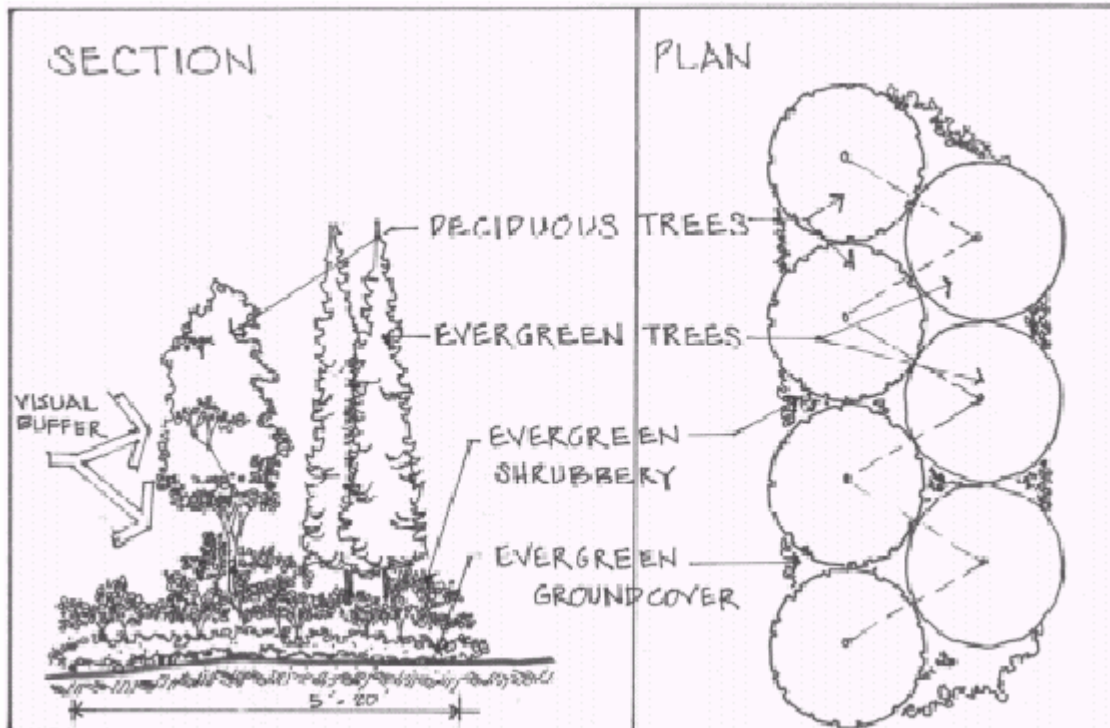
- Northwest native plants tend to be drought-tolerant and well-adapted to the local climate of rainy winters and dry summers. Following an initial season or two of irrigation, many native species become established and have little or no need for additional irrigation beyond natural rainfall. Native species such as the Big-Leaf Maple also have extensive root systems that help them tolerate and survive drought conditions. Finally, unlike the leaves of many deciduous trees, the leaves of Conifers (cone-bearing trees such as Pine) are coated with a waxy substance minimizing water loss.
- Designing native species into landscaping prevents the disturbance of soil and, thus, provides good erosion control.
- The native species typically do not require pesticides or fertilizers, since they have developed natural immunities to insect attacks, diseases, and low levels of nutrients.
- Native plants promote wildlife preservation by providing habitat, food, cover, and breeding areas.

What types of landscaping are described in the Zoning Code?

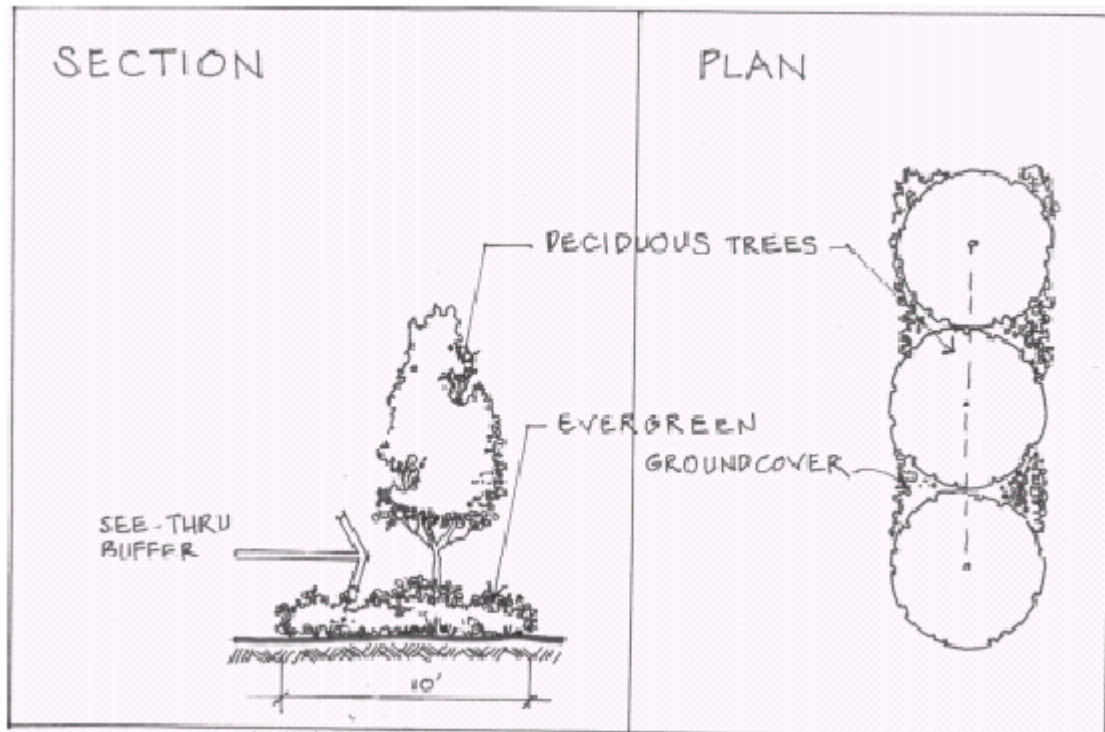
Depending on the land use for which a proposed parcel is intended, and on adjacent properties and their uses, one of three types of landscaping will be required. They are summarized in the text and graphics to follow:

TYPE I LANDSCAPING (Full Screen)

- Acts as a visual barrier
- Is typically found in the following places:
 - (1) Adjacent to freeways
 - (2) Between residential and non-residential areas
- Minimally consists of the following:
 - (1) A mix of primarily evergreen trees and shrubs generally interspersed throughout the landscape strip, spaced to form a continuous screen
 - (2) Between 70 and 90 percent evergreen trees
 - (3) Trees provided at the rate of one per ten linear feet of landscape strip and spaced no more than 30 feet apart on center
 - (4) Evergreen shrubs provided at the rate of one per four linear feet of landscape strip, and spaced no more than eight feet apart on center
 - (5) Ground cover, as specified in Chapter 21A.16.090 of the King County Code (KCC).

TYPE II LANDSCAPING (Filtered Screen)

- Functions as a visual separator
- Typically found or used:
 - (1) Between commercial and industrial uses
 - (2) Between differing types of residential development
 - (3) To screen industrial uses from the street.
- Minimally consists of the following:
 - (1) A mix of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs generally interspersed throughout the landscape strip and spaced to create a filtered screen
 - (2) At least 50 percent deciduous trees and at least 30 percent evergreen trees
 - (3) Trees provided at the rate of one per 20 linear feet of landscape strip and spaced no more than eight feet apart on center
 - (4) Shrubs provided at the rate of one per four linear feet of landscape strip and spaced no more than eight feet apart on center
 - (5) Ground cover, as specified in Chapter 21A.16.090 of the King County Code (KCC).

TYPE III LANDSCAPING (See-Through Screen)

- Functions as a partial visual separator
- Softens the appearance of parking areas and building elevations
- Typically found in the following areas:
 - (1) Along street frontages
 - (2) Between apartment developments.
- Minimally consists of the following:
 - (1) A mixture of evergreen and deciduous trees generally interspersed throughout the landscape strip, and spaced to create a continuous canopy
 - (2) At least 70 percent deciduous trees
 - (3) Trees provided at the rate of one per 25 linear feet of landscape strip, and spaced no more than 30 feet apart on center
 - (4) Shrubs provided at the rate of one per four linear feet of landscape strip, and spaced no more than eight feet apart on center
 - (5) Ground cover, as specified in Chapter 21A.16.090 of the King County Code (KCC).

What landscaping provisions pertain to surface parking areas?

For surface parking areas with ten or more parking stalls, parking area landscaping is required to provide shade and to diminish the visual effect of large paved areas. The amount of required landscaping varies with the type of development and typically includes the following:

- For residential developments with common parking areas, planting areas must be provided at the rate of 20 square feet per parking stall.
- For commercial, industrial, or institutional developments, landscaping must be provided at the following rates:
 - (1) 20 square feet per parking stall when there are ten to 30 parking stalls
 - (2) 25 square feet per parking stall when there are 31 or more parking stalls.

Trees are required and must be distributed throughout the parking area at the following rate:

- For residential or institutional development, one tree for every ten parking stalls
- For commercial or industrial development, one tree for every five parking stalls.

In addition to the requirements mentioned above, the maximum distance between any parking stall and landscaping must be no more than 100 feet. Permanent curbs or structural barriers are also required to protect the plantings from vehicle overhang.

The types and dimensions of required landscaping are as follows:

- Canopy-type deciduous trees, evergreen trees, evergreen shrubs, and ground covers planted in islands or strips are required.
- At least 70 percent of the trees must be deciduous.
- Shrubs must not exceed a height of 42 inches.
- Planting islands or strips are required in areas of at least 100 square feet each, with dimensions of no less than five feet.
- Ground cover must meet the specifications outlined in Section 21A.16.090 of the King County Code.
- Permanent curbs or structural barriers must be provided to protect plantings from vehicle overhang.

What is width averaging?

The street and perimeter landscaping requirements in Title 21A of the King County Code (KCC) are stated in terms of “average” widths. This means that the actual width of a required landscape strip may vary to accommodate features in the landscape plan such as topography or existing vegetation. For example, if a ten-foot-wide landscape strip is required along 100 feet of property line, a total landscape area of 1,000 square feet must be provided. The width of the landscaping may vary in width from five to 15 feet, as long as the total area (in square footage) of landscaping remains the same.

What alternative options are allowed for in landscaped areas?

The King County Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES) may approve alternative landscaping options if they accomplish equal or better levels of screening when compared to the types of landscaping described above, or when existing conditions on or adjacent to the site cause strict application of Zoning Code standards to be ineffective. Existing conditions may include significant topographical differences, vegetation, structures, or utilities. Strict application of the Zoning Code occasionally results in obstructions in scenic views or other undesirable situations. Alternative options are sometimes allowed to preserve the historic character of a rural place, or to encourage the use of native species typically associated with the Puget Sound Basin. For an alternative landscape option to be approved, the applicant must show that a superior result can be achieved, and the option must be consistent with guidelines for alternatives, as outlined in Section 21A.16.100 of the King County Code.

What Zoning Code standards apply to all landscaped areas?

Section 21A.16.085 of the King County Code contains the following general requirements that apply to all landscaping situations:

- The slope of berms is restricted to no more than two horizontal feet to each one vertical foot (2:1).
- For all new turf areas (except all-weather, sand-based athletic fields) a two-inch-thick layer of organic material, cultivated a minimum of six inches deep, is required.
- A soil analysis must be conducted to measure the texture and organic content of the soil (Five percent or more of organic content to a depth of six inches is required.), as well as the pH and infiltration rate of the soil.
- All other areas must have enough organic content to provide adequate nutrients and moisture-retention.
- To minimize evaporation, two inches of mulch cover is required for all landscaped areas (except for turf or areas of established groundcover).
- Plants having similar water use characteristics must be grouped together in distinct hydrozones (areas containing plants that require similar amounts of water).
- Preservation of existing vegetation is encouraged. When selecting plants, consideration should be given to the plant's adaptability to the climate, geologic, and topographical conditions of the site.
- Landscaping along street frontages, interior lot lines, surface parking lots, and areas adjacent to freeway rights-of-way must conform to the grades and standards of the American Association of Nurserymen (AAN).

Landscaping in these areas must also meet requirements pertaining to dimensions and placement of single and multiple stemmed trees and shrubs, ground covers, fences, landscaping within rights-of-way, and use of indigenous (native) plant species. See KCC Section 21A.16.090 for specific information.

NOTE: Alternative landscaping options may be considered if they meet the specifications of KCC Section 21A.16.100.

What is required for landscaping plans, plan review, and installation of landscaping?

According to Chapter 21A.16.115 of the King County Code, a landscape plan is required and must be certified by a Washington State registered Landscape Architect, a Washington State certified Nurseryman, or a Washington State certified landscaper.

The plan must be drawn on the same base map as the development plans and must identify the following:

- The total landscape area and separate hydrozones
- The botanical/common names and applicable sizes of all landscape materials
- Property lines
- Impervious surfaces
- Natural or man-made water features or bodies
- Existing or proposed structures, fences, and retaining walls
- Natural features or vegetation left in a natural state
- Designated recreational open-space areas.

The professional who certifies the landscaping plan must also oversee its installation. Within 30 days of completed installation, this professional must submit a signed affidavit to DDES that verifies the landscaping has been installed according to the plan, unless the installed landscaping has already been inspected and accepted by DDES.

The required landscaping must be installed no later than three months after issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy for the project or project phase. The time limit for compliance may, however, be extended to allow installation of required landscaping during the next appropriate planting season.

What requirements pertain to maintaining landscaping after it is installed?

After landscaping is installed, the following requirements pertain to maintenance and upkeep:

- All landscaping must be maintained for the life of the project. [See Section 21A.16.180 of the King County Code.]
- All landscaping must be pruned and trimmed, as necessary, to maintain a healthy growing condition or to prevent primary limb failure.
- Diseased, damaged, or stolen plantings must be replaced within three months, or during the next planting season, if the loss does not occur within a planting season (unless these plantings are retained to provide wildlife habitat).
- Landscaped areas must be kept free of trash.

Are financial guarantees or other securities required for landscaping?

Performance bonds or other appropriate securities are required for at least two years after planting or transplanting vegetation to ensure proper installation, establishment, and maintenance. (See DDES bulletin 40 for more information on Financial Guarantees.)

Where to find more information?

If applicants still need additional information after reviewing this bulletin, please contact the DDES Zoning Counter at 206-296-6600 with Zoning Code questions that pertain to landscaping requirements.

Other bulletins and telephone numbers that may be helpful

Bulletin 1	Building and Development Permit Telephone Numbers
Bulletin 8	Commercial/Multi-Family Building Permits
Bulletin 9	Obtaining a Residential Building Permit
Bulletin 12	Residential Building Permit Process
Bulletin 17A	Zoning Code: Overview and Summary
Bulletin 18A	Zoning Code: Permitted Use Tables
Bulletin 19A	Zoning Code: Irrigation System Requirements
Bulletin 21	Critical Areas Review
Bulletin 25	Short Subdivisions
Bulletin 40	Financial Guarantees

These and other DDES bulletins are available via the department Web site at www.kingcounty.gov/permits.

206-296-6600	DDES permit center
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King County complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you require an accommodation to attend a meeting (two weeks' notice) or require this information in Braille, audiocassette, or large print, please call 206-296-6600 or TTY 206-296-7217.