



Turf Buy Back Program 2019 Frequently Asked Questions

Rebate

How much can I be rebated?

The incentive is **\$1.50 per square foot** of qualifying conversion area. Rebates will be awarded **up to \$2,000 for residential properties, \$3,000 for commercial properties**. Checks are issued only to the property owner or owner's legally appointed representative. It takes 30-60 days after passing the Post-Conversion Inspection to receive the rebate check. The name on the application must match the property owner name on record and the W-9 tax form. Add 50 cents per square foot when you qualify for California's separate [lawn conversion program](http://www.saveourwaterrebates.com/turf-replacement-rebates.html). Learn more at: <http://www.saveourwaterrebates.com/turf-replacement-rebates.html>.

I already converted my lawn and have pictures to prove it. Can I apply for the rebate? No.

Rebates from the state and STPUD are not retroactive and projects completed prior to program enrollment are not eligible for rebates from the state or from STPUD. Please do not start your project until you receive your project approval.

I already started to let my lawn die. Is it too late to be accepted into the program?

No. Rebate funding permitted; you may still be eligible to participate in the program if your dying lawn is still a dense mat of grass without significant dirt patches.

Why do I need to provide a completed W-9 tax form?

All rebates that, individually or in combination, total \$600 or more in a tax year require submittal of a W-9 form to the District prior to payment. All personal information provided within the W-9 is kept confidential in accordance with the Privacy Act. If your total rebate amount is \$600 or more, you will receive a 1099 form to comply with Internal Revenue Service requirements. The determination of whether your rebate is taxable or not may depend on several variables.

Conversion Costs

How much does a conversion typically cost?

Other agency data reflects program participants spend about \$2.00 to \$3.00 per square foot for landscape construction. Elaborate landscapes with retaining walls, landscape lighting, and other amenities may cost \$5.00 per square foot or more. When considering the overall financial impact of your new landscape, don't forget to consider the reduction of your maintenance costs (and the time spent mowing, fertilizing and chasing down voles). Water use studies show the average household water and maintenance costs of similar program participants decreased by more than one-third.

How can the conversion be financed?

Many banks offer home improvement loans that can be used for landscaping. Since the District issues your rebate check within 60 days of completed project inspection, you can apply it against the principal of the loan at that time.

Can I do this myself?

Many individuals have the skills and experience to complete successful turf conversions. However, licensed landscape professionals are typically very efficient, knowledgeable of local regulations, and

can provide you with a comprehensive landscaping plan. If you are taking on all or part of the project, refer to the *Home Landscaping Guide for the Tahoe Basin and Vicinity*, obtain any required permits, and work with the District's water conservation staff for free conservation landscaping advice.

Artificial Turf

Can I receive credit for replacing my lawn with artificial turf?

No. Although artificial turf is utilized on community play fields, this program is intended to support water conservation through the use of plants that are native and have low irrigation needs. This is the recommended practice to support soil conservation and our unique local environment.

BMPs, concrete patios, walkways, and driveways

Do I get credit for installing Best Management Practices (BMPs) where my turf was removed?

In some instances turf functions as a BMP to stabilize soil in runoff receiving areas. Your conversion plan should account for landscape areas serving this important function. Consult a certified BMP evaluator or Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to obtain an approved BMP design alternative and reinstall the BMP treatment per the approved BMP retrofit plan. In most cases, approved BMP design alternatives will count towards the conversion.

Do I get credit for putting in a concrete patio, walkway, or an extension to my driveway?

No. You can incorporate them into your landscaping, but non-permeable areas will not be included when determining your rebate. However, if the patio or walkway is brick or flagstone with sand grouting (not concrete) allowing air and water to pass through, it is possible that this permeable hardscape could be included in your conversion area, assuming all other program requirements are met. Gravel pathways are also acceptable as long as they are permeable. It is the applicant's responsibility to verify they will not violate Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's coverage requirements.

Turf

Can I receive credit for replacing my high water-use turf with low water-use turf?

No. This program provides an incentive to convert turf to less water and fertilizer intensive landscapes which include a mix of trees, shrubs, perennials, bunch grasses, ground covers and mulch such as wood chip and rock. These resource conserving landscapes use less water than even the lowest water-use cool season turf grass.

The District does encourage homeowners to use low water-use turf grass where desirable lawn areas are retained. Alternatively, the converted area could be seeded with low water-use native wildflowers and low growing bunch grasses. This mixture is an effective erosion control, defensible space, and wildlife habitat enhancing alternative to turf which requires minimal maintenance, water and no fertilizer.

If I have kids and a dog, how do I incorporate water smart landscaping in my yard?

One of the principles of water smart landscaping is functional lawn areas. You don't have to eliminate your entire lawn to participate. Some conversion projects involve creating a buffer area around the edge of an existing lawn while retaining functional turf areas. To determine where you have nonfunctional turf, ask yourself "Is the only time I walk on the lawn when I am mowing it?" If so, sign up for the Turf Buy Back Program, utilize available Tahoe landscaping resources and start planning your turf area conversion. Also, ask your landscaper or District water conservation staff to perform an irrigation efficiency evaluation on your functional turf areas.

Homeowner's Associations

What if my HOA requires me to keep turf in my yard?

Most government jurisdictions in the Tahoe area have ordinances that prevent a homeowner's association (HOA) from restricting the installation of a water-saving landscape. In some cases, your HOA board may not be aware of the potential conflict between their covenants and the ordinance. To avoid problems, be sure you follow all appropriate HOA policies that may apply to your new landscaping project.

Mulch

What is mulch, and why do you require it?

The most common types of mulch used in Tahoe are rocks, bark, wood chips, pine needles and more recently coarse compost. Mulch helps maintain soil moisture and temperature levels. Without mulch, wind and heat draw moisture away from plant roots. Additionally, constant soil temperature fluctuations cause significant plant stress. Mulch reduces weeds, soil erosion and feeds the soil organisms which convert organic material to plant available nutrients and supports a productive soil structure.

Plants

What plants can I use in my water smart landscape?

The Turf Buy-Back program does not require specific replacement plants, but requires that the majority of plants used to be low water, drought tolerant, native and Tahoe adapted, and non-invasive plants species as described in the *Home Landscaping Guide for Tahoe and Vicinity*. The program only accepts landscape conversions that provide 25% plant cover at 5 years of maturity.

Utilize the *Home Landscaping Guide for Tahoe and Vicinity* (provided free by the District), District staff and resources and, local landscapers and nurseries for plant suggestions.

Do I get credit for removing high water-use plants?

No. The program only focuses on turf removal and the conversion of spray irrigation systems to high efficiency irrigation systems. However, switching from spray irrigation to drip irrigation in these areas will translate to water savings. It is more efficient to put the water only where it can be used by the plants.

I have many plants surrounding the grass that I am removing. Will these plants count towards the 25% plant coverage requirement?

No. The District only counts the plants that are currently planted in the grass area. Also, transplanting mature shrubs and trees, especially drought adapted species, spells certain disaster. Do your research and get professional advice on how, when, and which plants can be transplanted from one landscape area to another.

Why do you require plants in the conversion area?

This program encourages the use of water efficient landscaping practices. Water efficient landscapes which incorporate a variety of plant materials are attractive, sustainable, and don't need to conflict with local and state regulations such as BMP and defensible space requirements. Revegetating with plants and mulch, instead of just mulch, can provide shade, absorb carbon dioxide, supply oxygen, reduce soil erosion, enhance wildlife habitat, decrease energy use, lower air temperatures and provide a host of other benefits.

Do plants have to cover 25% of the conversion area when you come to inspect the project for completion?

No, but save your plant information and care tags to assist the District in determining if in five years the plants will cover 25% of the landscape.

Why can't I use an impermeable weed barrier like plastic?

An impermeable weed barrier causes precipitation to run off which contributes to soil erosion. Not allowing water and air to pass through the barrier and into the soil can cause serious damage to the plants and soil health in the immediate and surrounding area.

Irrigation

Why do I need to change my existing lawn sprinklers to a high efficiency irrigation system?

Fixed spray irrigation, the typical turf irrigation system choice of residential landscapes, can waste up to 50% of your irrigation water. Most converted landscapes do not require the entire area to be watered, especially at high application rates. Your irrigation conversion options include the use of high efficiency micro irrigation. In some instances, the use of high efficiency spray nozzles in the conversion will be approved by the Water Conservation Program staff. To maintain rebate eligibility, uses of high efficiency spray nozzles require pre-authorization by Program staff.

Why do I need a filter and pressure regulator in my drip irrigation system?

The emitters of micro drip irrigation systems have very small openings for the water to pass through. The filter prevents sediment from clogging the emitters, ensuring plants will get the correct amount of water. A pressure regulator keeps the irrigation system at the manufacturer's recommended pressure (usually between 20 and 30 pounds per square inch). Failure to install a pressure regulator may cause fittings to break and lines to fail creating leaks in your system.

Why do I need a backflow prevention device on my drip irrigation system?

When water pressure drops, water under higher pressure moves to areas of lower pressure. This means that contaminated water in or near the openings of your irrigation system can back up into the potable water supply. This is called backflow which is a significant health and safety code violation. If your irrigation water supply source is not already fitted with the appropriate backflow prevention device, it is your responsibility to do this during your low pressure irrigation conversion.