

ACC DESIGN GUIDELINE FOR LANDSCAPING

1. General

a. Sandia Heights is based on an open space concept where the natural vegetation is of great importance. The deed restrictions for the area require that the natural vegetation be left undisturbed where possible and replenished after construction is finished.

b. The use of native plants reduces water use and the need for insecticides and other maintenance, making our community landscape more habitat-friendly and easier and less expensive to maintain.

c. Bare ground creates erosion and water quality problems and is not part of our native landscape. It also allows invasive species to gain a foothold; these are difficult to remove, once established. Restoration plans for septic system repair, house additions, grading activities, or any other construction that disturbs more than 400 square feet total, must be submitted to, and approved in writing by the ACC prior to the start of the related construction work. Restoration or landscaping of any construction must be completed by the end of the current growing season following substantial completion of exterior construction, or the end of the next growing season if exterior construction is completed in winter. The growing season is defined as April through October, so a project completed in June must be restored/landscaped by the end of October that same year, and a project completed in December would be restored/landscaped by the end of the following October. Plans for any landscaping or restoration of new or existing homes must be submitted to and approved in writing by the ACC prior to the start of landscaping.

d. Care should be taken to protect all existing native plants and to maintain the natural character of the landscape. Minimize landscape impacts by cordoning off areas to be preserved during any construction projects. The covenants state that "Natural vegetation is to be left undisturbed where practical on residential lots, except for access to property, clearing of building sites and establishment of lawns and flower beds adjacent to buildings."

e. Landscaping shall minimize visual encroachment on open space and the streetscape. Low-height plants and trees that blend with their surroundings tend to achieve these goals.

f. Residents are asked to keep their properties clear of dead trees and other dead vegetation, as this material is unsightly and is easily combustible, posing a fire hazard. Shrubs and other vegetation can be a safety hazard when they block views along roads; owners are required to maintain all sight lines along roads for pedestrian and traffic safety.

2. Location/Size of Non-native Landscaped Areas

a. Non-native landscaped areas should be immediately adjacent to the residence, detached buildings, walkways, or driveways on the property. The total area of non-native landscape on the property shall occupy a minimal portion of the post-construction open area of the lot. As a maximum, it shall not exceed 50 percent of the combined total ground floor heated living areas of the residence. Swimming pools and garages, whether heated or not, will not be included in the calculation of heated living areas. Landscaped areas that extend from the house or other buildings at all points less than one half the

average of the overall length and width of the house or building are considered to be adjacent to those structures. Similar proportions relative to the size of walkways and driveways shall define their adjacent areas.³

b. Non-native trees shall be planted only in areas adjacent to the house or building. The ACC may, at its discretion, approve native trees to be planted in areas of the property that are not adjacent to the house or building. Planting trees of any kind in any setback areas will not be approved. Landscaping elements (such as boulders, planters, flowers, and shrubs) that do not interfere with the visual continuity of the land and vegetation are allowed in setback areas if they are placed immediately adjacent to buildings, walkways or driveways.

c. Lawn areas must be less than 500 square feet.

3. Features

a. The use of gravel, rock, or crushed or decomposed granite, or similar materials for landscaping purposes, including mulch, should be kept to a minimum (400 square feet or less is recommended) and located adjacent to the house or driveway, so as to preserve the natural look of the area. Large expanses of gravel and similar materials (including concrete) produce excessive reflected heat, disrupt wildlife habitat, and are not in harmony with the natural surroundings of Sandia Heights. Use of river rock or similar materials to control erosion is permitted in all areas where it is required, although native plants should be interspersed within the rock areas to assist in stabilizing the soil and improve the aesthetics of rock areas.

Excessive use of gravel: Gravel or similar materials, including mulch, are not to be substituted for natural vegetation within view of the street. Additionally, covering an entire yard with gravel or similar materials, including mulch, is contrary to the spirit of preserving the natural beauty of the Sandia Heights environment, whether the yard or area is smaller than 400 square feet or not, and will not be approved.

Color of gravel, rock, or decomposed granite: The intent and purpose of the Sandia Heights covenants is to enhance, as much as possible, the natural ambience of the area. Careful consideration should be given to the color of gravels chosen; there are any number of naturally colored gravels that blend well with our environment. Unnatural colors such as black, white, red, orange, or light grays will not be approved as being contrary to the spirit of the covenants.

Flatwork: Concrete or pavers may be used for walkways, driveways, and patios provided it is colored to avoid glaring white or off-white colors once cured. Earth-toned colorants are available for concrete and should be used.

b. Water features shall not exceed six feet in height. They should be in areas that are generally only visible to the homeowner. Location and size should also consider noise: the sound of a waterfall may be pleasing to some, but annoying to others. Water features attract wildlife, so you should consider whether or not you want wildlife (including large predators like bobcats, bears, mountain lions, and coyotes) in your yard before you install a water feature.

c. There are many other items that are also included in landscape designs. These include, but are not limited to, walls (including retaining walls), fences, gates, driveways, courtyards, patios, pathways, lighting, awnings, play equipment, grading and drainage features, hornos, hot tubs, outdoor kitchens, trellises, ramadas, pergolas, fire pits, greenhouses, flagpoles, sculpture, boulders, bark and various gravel mulches, and yard

art. The addition of any of these features must be approved by the ACC prior to installation, whether these features are visible from neighboring properties.

For additional information on walls and fences, please refer to the ACC Design Guideline for Walls and Fences.

4. View Considerations

a. It is recognized that trees and shrubs that are planted on ground that is higher in elevation than that of neighboring properties are potentially more intrusive. Trees and shrubs that are unnecessarily intrusive or obstructive of the views of neighbors are discouraged and subject to disapproval. In general, trees that will stand higher than the roofline or 26 feet at maturity, whichever is greater, will not be approved.

b. Trees and shrubs shall not be grouped to form a view-obstructing screen; however, such screening is appropriate to obscure items like ground-mounted air conditioners, pool filters, and other such mechanical devices. Three or more trees are considered to constitute a screen if planted close enough together so that at maturity their branches visually touch or intertwine.

5. Plant Selection

Plants native to the area are preferred. The use of appropriate plant material will save you maintenance effort, time, water, and money. Native plants are far less likely to need pesticides, which is much healthier for the environment. Plants that are not native to Sandia Heights should be selected to minimize water use, increase the habitat available for wildlife, and produce less invasive seeds than an unplanned landscape with a similar quantity of plant material.

Bermuda grass is not allowed because of its invasive characteristics.

6. Disallowed:

The following plants **are not allowed** because they have one or more faults: weak wood that breaks in windy conditions, high water use, excessive pollen, invasive roots, litter (leaves, fruit), or susceptibility to insects or disease.

a. Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*)

Aspens use a lot of water and are susceptible to disease at our elevation. They can also be invasive, as they propagate by suckering as well as by seed.

b. Cottonwood (*Populus species*)

Cotton-bearing cottonwoods are prohibited by the Sandia Heights covenants because of the clouds of cottony seeds they release. Cottonwoods are high water use trees, are susceptible to borers and disease, have weak wood, and male trees produce large quantities of pollen.

c. Russian Olive (*Eleagnus angustifolia*)

These are high water use trees and have weak wood that causes branches to break or trees to fall when it's windy. Russian Olives also produce excessive litter (leaves and fruit) and are invasive in arroyos and streambeds.

d. Salt Cedar (*Tamarisk species*)

Salt cedars are extreme water guzzlers and are considered invasive.

e. Siberian Elm (*Ulmus pumila*)

Siberian elm is an invasive weed tree that reseeds prolifically. Problems include weak wood, litter, invasiveness, roots invading septic tanks, aggressive reseeding, and elm leaf beetle.

f. Box Elder (*Acer negundo*)

Problems include excessive height, weedy characteristics, and weak wood that is subject to breakage.

g. Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)

The primary problem with this tree is invasiveness—it suckers badly and reseeds everywhere. It also has weak wood, poor structure, invasive roots, and excessive litter. It is very difficult to eradicate and has an offensive odor.

h. Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*)

Ponderosas are beautiful and fast-growing but require lots of water and grow too tall (over 26') and block views. They get stressed at our elevation by wind and drought, making them more susceptible to pine tip moth and bark beetle.

i. Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*)

Silver maple is the least desirable of all maple trees, which are Eastern US natives that prefer acid soil. Silver maple gets chlorotic in our alkaline soil, has weak wood subject to breakage and aggressive roots that invade sewers and septic tanks, is unusually susceptible to aphids and cottony scale, and grows fast to 40-100 feet with equal width, making it an excessively tall view blocker.

j. Lombardy Poplar (*Populus nigra 'Italica'*)

Lombardy poplars are short lived, too tall (40-100 feet), and are susceptible to borers, root rot, trunk canker, and scale.

k. Mulberry (*Morus species*)

All mulberry varieties are prohibited by the City of Albuquerque. Male trees are heavy pollen producers and female trees litter fruit. Roots are shallow and invasive.

l. Cypress (*Cupressus species*)

All cypress varieties are prohibited by the City of Albuquerque because of high pollen production. SHHA supports the City Pollen Ordinance, even though Sandia Heights is outside the city limits.

Some tree species, like fruit trees, may be desirable. These are often hardy, aesthetically pleasing, and offer the benefit of fresh fruit. They also have unintended consequences, such as attracting wildlife, especially bears and coyotes. If you're concerned about wildlife in your yard, it is best to avoid planting the species that are attractive to wildlife.

All landscape species must be approved in writing by the ACC as part of a landscaping application, before they are planted. Numerous reference books on the subject of gardening in New Mexico describe native and adapted trees that do well in our area. See the list of resources below.

Waterwise Principles

Patience is necessary to establish a landscape anywhere; but special approaches are demanded by the unique conditions in Sandia Heights. Extreme temperatures and low humidity limit the plants that can be grown successfully in our community. The SHHA has compiled a list at the beginning of these guidelines of books and native plant nurseries to aid both newly transplanted and firmly established residents in developing home landscaping compatible with our high desert grassland environment.

Many beautiful plants, both New Mexico natives and exotics, are well adapted to our

environment. Native plants already present in the natural landscape—cholla, apache plume, rabbitbrush (Chamisa), juniper, sumac, mountain mahogany and scrub live oak—provide the cornerstones of our landscaping. The most successful landscapes use plants compatible with the natives. While many desert plants are slow in starting, they are rewarding in the long run. Little attention is required after they are established, and they remain remarkably free of insect pests.

Water

Few high-water-use-plants are appropriate in our environment. Water is a precious commodity in the Southwest and will become even more so over time. An entirely high-water-use garden is unnecessary when many beautiful plants are adapted to, or thrive on, low water levels. Xeriscape principles suggest that a garden have three different water zones: highest use (for turf areas), moderate use (shrubs, trees, and perennials), and lowest use (native plants). The highest water use area should be located nearest the house, where irrigation costs can be minimized, and shade can help prevent evaporation of water. By placing highest water use plants at the house, they can be carefully maintained and admired with the least amount of work. The moderate water use area can be located concentrically around the high use area, taking advantage of runoff to supplement lesser irrigation. The native area can be concentric to the moderate use area and will encompass most of the yard and its native plantings.

Most desert plants need to be watered regularly until they are established. However, once they are well rooted, supplemental watering can be reduced to periodic, deep irrigation, with emphasis on supplemental irrigation during times of drought.

Lawns

A number of alternatives to traditional bluegrass lawns offer ease of maintenance and low water use, including grama grass, buffalo grass, and the somewhat drought resistant fescues. Alternate turf choices that work well are thyme and veronica. Some residents have developed good grassy areas by encouraging the existing grama grass on their property. Others have added flowers to make a blooming meadow. If you have a bluegrass lawn, consider setting your mower at least 3” high; longer grass needs less water and fertilizer than closely cropped grass.

Trees

Native trees in our area hug the arroyos for water and protection from wind. Tall trees are risky because of our frequent high winds. Heat and drought negatively affect many trees; however, there are numerous natives that provide shade, color, and texture to the garden.⁷

Restoration Plants

Restoration is required for any disturbance of over 400 square feet, total. Provide temporary irrigation (a hose and sprinkler will suffice) and water once a week for 12 weeks to ensure survival and growth. Once the vegetation is established, irrigation can be removed.

A seed mix that includes blue grama, little bluestem, Indian ricegrass, sideoats grama, buffalo grass, and sheep fescue as the main species (10-20% each) will work for our location. If native shrubs were removed for the work, consider using the following species as replacements. Place them in similar locations as the pre-disturbance landscaping.

- Fourwing Saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*)
- Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia sp.*)

- Prickly pear can be propagated by removing a paddle from an existing plant and placing it in a
- small trench, deep enough to hold the paddle upright. The paddle will root almost right away.
- Cholla Cactus (*Opuntia sp.*)
- These can also be propagated by removing a section at the naturally occurring joint and placing it
- in a hole deep enough to support the section. The section will root almost right away.
- Chamisa (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*)
- Big sage (*Artemisia sp.*)
- Winterfat (*Ceratoides lanata*)
- Three-leaf Sumac (*Rhus trilobata*)
- Beargrass (*Nolina greenei*)
- Apache Plume (*Fallugia paradoxa*)

These guidelines are established to ensure that the installation of landscaping complies with the Covenants, blends with its surroundings, and uses plant and tree types that are courteous to the neighborhood by considering potential view obstruction, water conservation, seed/pollen emission, etc. Landscaping should be aesthetically pleasing and maintain the existing character of the site, increase the habitat available for wildlife, prevent wind and water erosion, and support water quality goals. These guidelines codify limitations on the location, height, and size of landscaped areas and plant selection in order to minimally impact open spaces and natural vegetation.

The guidelines provide general standards only and the ACC may deviate from them, in its sole discretion, as dictated by site-specific considerations.

To encourage creativity, freedom, and flexibility, these guidelines do not specify which specific plants to use. Our microclimates create challenges and opportunities for each landscape site, so we encourage you to research what will work best for your particular location. Some resources include:

- Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority's xeriscape plant list at <http://www.abcwua.org/pdfs/xeriplantlist.pdf>.
- Down to Earth: A Gardener's Guide to the Albuquerque Area, Albuquerque Master Gardeners
- New Mexico Gardener's Guide, Judith Phillips
- Best Plants for New Mexico Gardens and Landscapes, Baker H. Morrow
- City of Albuquerque's "Plants for Pollinators" brochure
- High Country Gardens, 6921 Pan American Freeway, 867-8585
- Plants of the Southwest, 6680 4th St. NW, 344-8830

Call the SHHA Office, and they will get you in touch with local gardeners. The three books referenced above are available for your use at the SHHA office.

Note: Guidelines for freestanding walls and fences are provided by the ACC Guidelines for Walls and Fences.

Authority: *The SHHA Board of Directors, on August 11, 2021, recognized and adopted ACC Design Guidelines contained in the ACC Handbook and published on the SHHA website as Community Documents binding upon all SHHA members and activities.*

(Revised March 20, 2024)