

Natural Landscape Areas

What is a Natural Landscape Area?

A Natural Landscape Area is a portion of a property that is intentionally planted, restored, or maintained using native vegetation, such as wildflowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees.

These areas:

- Are distinct from traditional lawns and decorative landscaping
- Create a naturalized, habitat-focused appearance
- Must be clearly defined and maintained
- Do not include existing wooded areas, wetlands, ponds, or streams

Requirements

Maximum Area

- Natural landscape areas may cover up to 50% of the pervious (green) area of a property
- Existing natural wooded areas, wetlands, and water bodies are excluded from this calculation

Required Setbacks

Natural landscape areas must be located:

- At least 15 feet from property lines, unless:
 - Adjacent to another natural landscape area, or
 - Adjacent to a wetland, pond, lake, or stream
- At least 5 feet from buildings or structures
- At least 15 feet from the right-of-way or private street

Design Standards

Natural landscape areas must:

- Have all existing lawn and vegetation removed prior to installation
- Be planted with native species using seed or transplants
- Be clearly defined, using:
 - A fence that meets garden fence standards, or
 - Another approved border as determined by the Planning Director

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Do I need a permit to install a natural landscaped area?

A: Yes. You can find the application [HERE](#)

Q: Can I replace part of my lawn with native plants?

A: Yes. Up to 50% of your pervious yard area may be converted, provided all standards are met.

Q: What qualifies as native vegetation?

A: Native plants are species that naturally occur in Northeast Ohio. Examples include:

- Black-eyed Susans
- Purple coneflower
- Milkweed
- Little bluestem

Q: Do I need to remove my existing grass first?

A: Yes. All lawn grasses and existing vegetation must be removed or eliminated before establishing a natural landscape area.

Q: Do I need to install a fence?

A: The area must be **clearly defined**. This can be accomplished with:

- A compliant garden fence, or
- Another approved border, such as stone edging, metal edging, or a low decorative fence

Q: Can the area extend to my property line?

A: Generally, no. A 15-foot setback is required unless:

- The area borders a similar natural landscape area, or
- The area is adjacent to a water feature (wetland, pond, or stream)

Q: Can I install a natural landscape area near my house?

A: Yes, but it must be located at least 5 feet from buildings or structures.

Q: Are natural landscape areas allowed in front yards?

A: Yes. However, they must meet all setback requirements, including being at least 15 feet from the street, and must be clearly defined.

Q: What is the difference between a natural landscape area and an unmaintained yard?

A: A natural landscape area is:

- Intentionally designed and planted
- Maintained with native species
- Clearly defined with borders

Unmaintained or overgrown yards with weeds or invasive species are **not permitted**.

Examples

Compliant Examples

Backyard Pollinator Garden

- A homeowner converts part of the backyard into native wildflowers and grasses
- Turf grass is removed
- A split-rail fence defines the area
- ☑ Meets all requirements

Side Yard Along a Stream

- Natural plantings installed next to a stream
- Located within 15 feet of the property line
- ☑ Setback exemption applies due to adjacent water feature

Front Yard Native Meadow

- A defined planting area is installed 20 feet from the street
- Edged with a metal or stone border
- ☑ Complies with setbacks and definition requirements

Non-Compliant Examples

Unmaintained Overgrowth

- Lawn is left unmowed with weeds and invasive plants
- No clear boundary or intentional planting
- ✗ Does not meet requirements

Too Close to the Street

- Native plants installed within 5 feet of the sidewalk
- ✗ Violates the 15-foot right-of-way setback

Why These Regulations Were Established

The City of Stow adopted Natural Landscape Area standards to balance environmental benefits with neighborhood compatibility and property maintenance expectations.

Prior to these standards, the City received:

- Complaints about overgrown yards, where it was unclear whether properties were intentionally planted or simply unmaintained
- Complaints of pest infestations in neighborhoods
- Disputes between neighbors regarding “tall grass”, weeds, and unmaintained landscaping versus purposeful native plantings
- Enforcement challenges, due to a lack of clear criteria distinguishing naturalized landscaping from nuisance conditions

These regulations were created to:

- **Provide Clarity**
 - Establish a clear definition of what constitutes a planned natural landscape area versus an unmaintained property.
- **Protect Neighborhood Character**
 - Ensure naturalized areas are:
 - Properly located
 - Intentionally designed
 - Visually defined
- **Ensure Safe and Sanitary Conditions**
 - Ensure native landscaping is maintained and setback from buildings and property lines to prevent infestations of pests or the proliferation of noxious weeds
- **Support Environmental Goals**
 - Encourage the use of native plants, which:
 - Support pollinators and wildlife
 - Improve stormwater infiltration
 - Reduce the need for irrigation and fertilizers
- **Prevent Conflicts**
 - Set consistent standards for:
 - Size limitations
 - Location and setbacks
 - Required borders and maintenance

This framework allows residents to enjoy environmentally beneficial landscaping while minimizing negative impacts on neighbors and surrounding properties.

Permitting Process

Establishing a Natural Landscape Area will require review and approval by the Planning Department to ensure compliance with City standards.

What You Will Need to Submit

1. Site Plan - A simple plan drawing (to scale or approximate) showing:

- Property boundaries
- Location and size of the proposed natural landscape area
- Distances to:
 - Property lines
 - Buildings and structures
 - Streets or right-of-way
- Any nearby features such as:
 - Wetlands
 - Streams or ponds
 - Adjacent natural landscape areas

2. Planting Plan / Plant List - Provide a list or description of:

- Native plant species to be installed
- General planting method (seed mix, plugs, container plants, etc.)
- Approximate coverage or layout (if available)

This does not need to be highly technical but should demonstrate intentional design using native vegetation.

3. Border / Edge Treatment - Indicate how the area will be clearly defined, such as:

- Garden fence (meeting City standards)
- Split rail fence
- Stone or brick edging
- Metal or landscape edging
- Other treatments (subject to approval by the Planning Director)

4. Maintenance Description (Recommended) - A brief description of how the area will be maintained, such as:

- Seasonal cutting or trimming
- Weed and invasive species control
- Ongoing plant management

Need Assistance?

Planning staff are available to review concepts before submission, suggest appropriate native plant options and help ensure compliance with City regulations. Early coordination can help streamline approval and avoid revisions.