

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MAINTENANCE:

LET'S CARE FOR THE LAND



FALL 2025

CREDITS

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Ecology & Mapping



Irrigation



Engagement & Funding

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A LETTER FROM DPS...

We are proud to share the first Sustainable Landscape Standard & Implementation Plan for Denver Public Schools (DPS)!

This plan is a result of the first-ever DPS Climate Action Plan, which in turn was developed in response to **student-driven** climate advocacy.

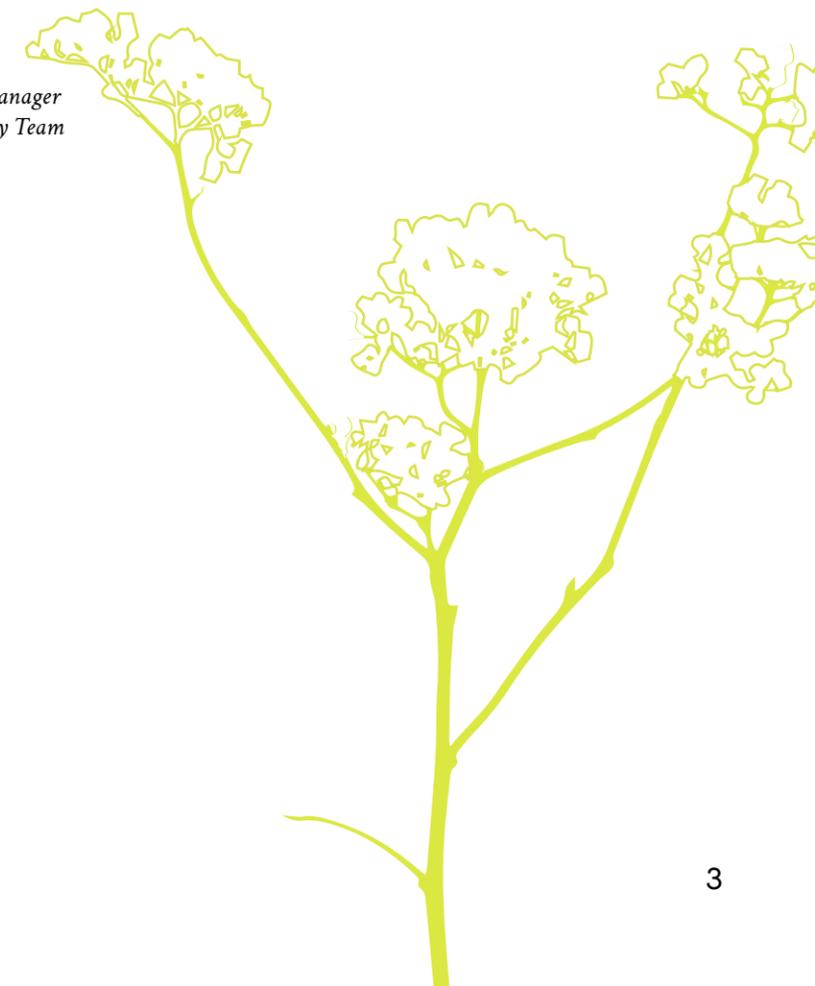
We intend for this plan to be used for projects across the district to **transform landscapes** into spaces that are environmentally, socially, and financially sustainable and beneficial, while also being tailored to Denver's unique climate, soil types, and growing conditions.

We partnered with Superbloom to develop a standard for our region and cater to the demands of high use play areas and community spaces.

This plan is for students, staff, and the community. **We can't wait to grow with you!**

- Denver Public Schools

Chris Woodburn, *Sustainability Program Manager*
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SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPES PLAN DOCUMENTS

*This Plan is comprised of several
component documents:*



Sustainable Landscapes Manual
Public Document

This manual is a step-by-step guide to help Denver Public Schools transform lawns into resilient, water-smart landscapes. With simple tools for choosing plants, improving soil, setting up irrigation, and caring for new plantings, it makes it easy to create greener schoolyards that save water, support learning, and bring nature back to campus.



Maintenance Manual
Public Document

This manual provides Denver Public Schools with clear, practical guidance for maintaining sustainable landscapes across school sites. It explains how to care for new plantings during the critical establishment phase (0–3 years) and how to transition into long-term maintenance (3+ years). Organized by season, it outlines tasks for watering, pruning, weeding, and monitoring plant health, while also offering troubleshooting tips for irrigation and plant replacement. The appendix includes resources like weed identification guides, a maintenance flow chart, and links to external references that support pollinator health and sustainable practices.



Public Outreach Strategy
Internal DPS Document

This manual creates a plan for engaging with students, staff and the community through both landscape design, and installation phases. Part 3 of the manual describes opportunities for long-term student engagement, including methods of connecting students to and sparking on-going interest in the land, plants, soil and water.



The 30 Sites Assessment
Internal DPS Document

Thirty (30) Denver Public School campuses were selected by DPS based on factors including size of site, equity index, known opportunities, and representation of all grade levels from across the entire district.

This manual presents an analysis of thirty DPS schools, focusing on opportunities to replace high-maintenance lawn areas with low-water-use planting. The evaluation also considers heat island severity, soil conditions, and the status of existing irrigation systems.



Implementation & Funding
Internal DPS Document

This document acts as a resource for Denver Public Schools, highlighting possible paths for project funding.



Pilot Projects
Internal DPS Document

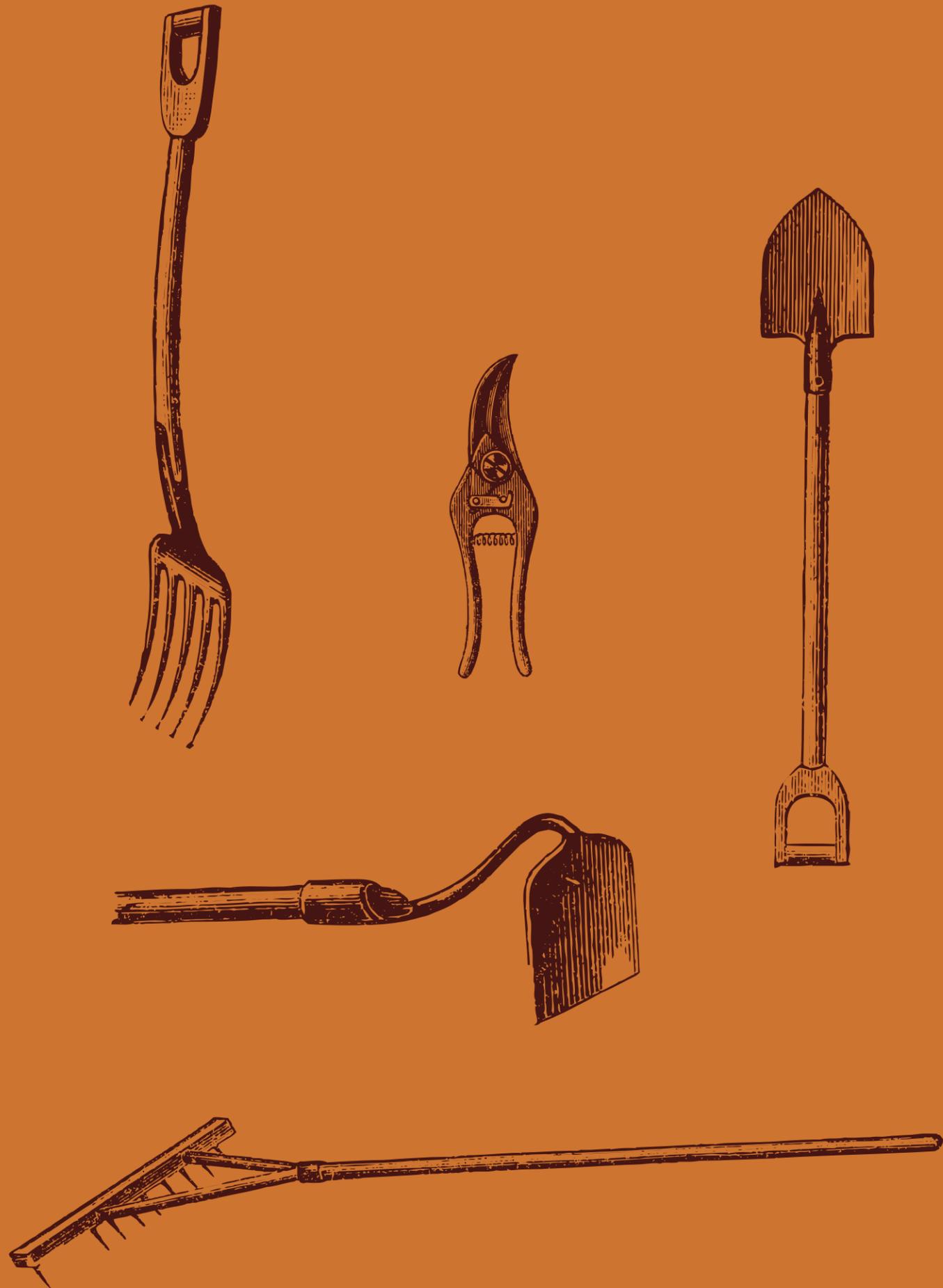
Three school campuses were selected by DPS to act as Pilot Projects, chosen for their differences and for that school's potential for engaging with the public about turf conversion projects.

The Project Team developed a conceptual drawing package for all three schools, suggesting how proposed planting can be quantified, and irrigation addressed.



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YOU ARE
THE STEWARDS
OF THESE LANDSCAPES!

INTRODUCTION

Learning How to be Stewards of the Land

Your landscapes will look different, feel different, and respond differently to care. You will see more pollinators—bees, butterflies, and moths. You'll likely also encounter things you did not before. It will be a learning process.

The care your campus landscapes receive needs to match the needs of its plant communities. While mowing lawn may be a familiar

task, the needs of native and drought-tolerant perennials, grasses, and shrubs will be different and may take some time to adjust to.

As you get to know the plants you care for, we hope you will feel more connected to land and can share that knowledge and understanding with students, staff, and the community. You are the primary stewards of these landscapes!

ESTABLISHING & MAINTAINING SEEDS & PLANTS

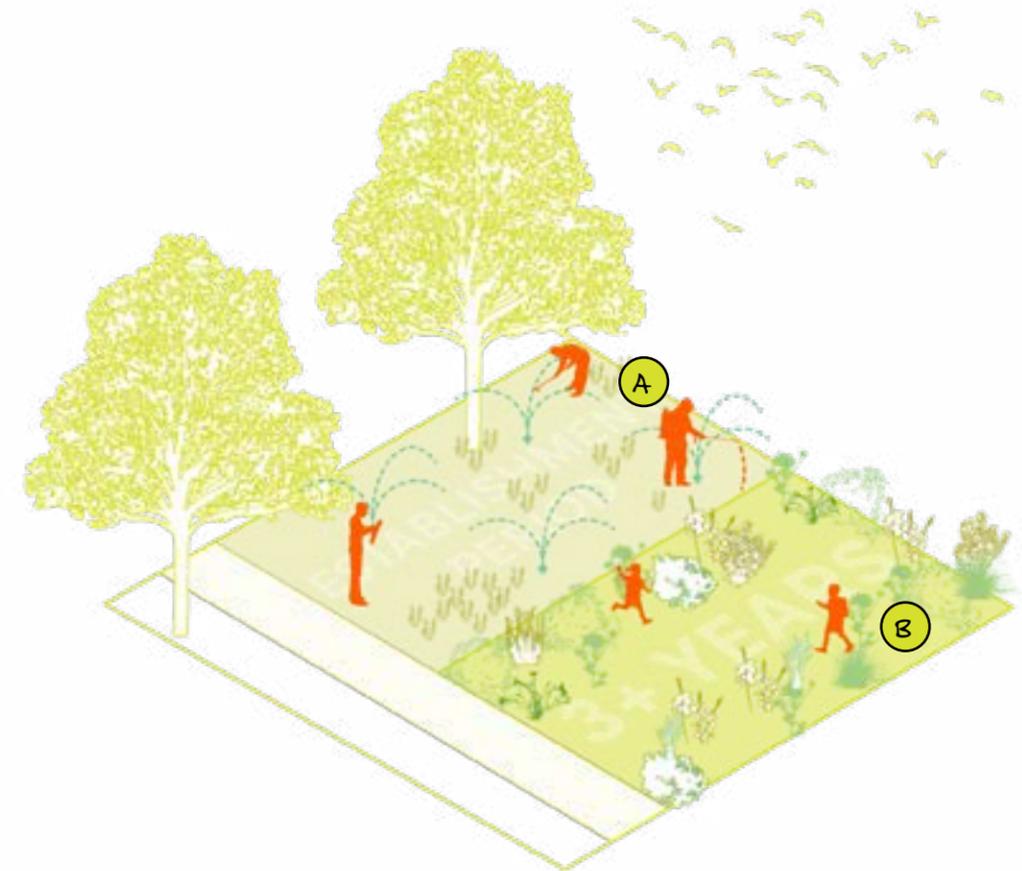
Understanding the process:

Sustainable maintenance refers to stewardship of DPS spaces so that they support ecological health, for the planted areas and the various creatures they support as well as for the school community.

Aligned with a sustainable planting and irrigation strategy, the maintenance plan reflects a move away from traditional lawn care, adapting practices to support the needs

of a newly established plant community.

This manual describes what is needed for the critical establishment period (1-3 years) of seeded or container planting, as well as for trees. It then shifts to a plan for long-term maintenance and care organized by season. This document concludes with images of common weeds to look for and remove and a list of resources for additional information and reference.



A Getting Plants Started

Young plantings need consistent attention to overcome stress and establish strong roots. Never remove more than 1/3 of a tree or shrub and be careful not to remove the top of the tree. Avoid shearing shrubs, as this damages shrubs in our community.



B Sustained Stewardship

After establishment, maintenance shifts to seasonal cycles of pruning, soil care, and adaptive management.

ARE YOU JUST STARTING YOUR PROJECT OR 3+ YEARS INTO IT?

0-3 YEARS

3+ YEARS

Establishment Period: Newly planted areas need extra attention during the first few years to support healthy root growth, control weeds, and ensure plants take hold. This phase requires more frequent maintenance and monitoring than long-term care.

Long-Term Care: Once plants are established, maintenance needs decrease and shift towards routine tasks like seasonal pruning, occasional weeding, and irrigation checks. The focus becomes sustaining healthy growth with less intensive effort.

THE FOLLOWING PAGES INCLUDE SEASONAL CHECKLISTS TO KEEP UP WITH REGULAR CARE TASKS

TOOLS FOR SUCCESSFUL MAINTENANCE

Updating our Methods

Since we're changing our landscapes, we'll also need to change how we care for them. While traditional turf lawns will still be mowed as before, native and drought-tolerant plantings need to be checked on and handled differently.

You'll need the right tools to tend shrubs, perennials, and grasses, and to establish a new routine of care. On the next pages, you'll see what this care might look like in practice—and how your team can find an easy rhythm as stewards of these renewed landscapes.

MAINTENANCE EQUIPMENT

TASK BY AREA



Image Credit: Brad Revare, Neighborhood Resilience Corps





SUMMER

ESTABLISHMENT PERIOD (0-3 YEARS)

Goals:

- Plants look healthy
- Weeds are under control
- Irrigation functions properly



Collect
Gather allium seeds directly from seed heads and store for future use.

TASK	LOOK FOR	NOTES
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Irrigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are spray heads watering all plants? • Is water spraying areas it should not, like sidewalks or roadways? 	Continue to check all heads and irrigation lines for proper and consistent coverage. Replace broken and damaged irrigation parts if they are observed.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Weed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New sprouts that are unfamiliar 	<p>Smaller areas near student use: Pull weeds by hand or use a long-handled weeding tool for greater efficiency.</p> <p>Larger areas away from student use: Apply spot treatment of herbicide when necessary.</p> <p>General tips: Whenever possible, remove weeds before they go to seed to prevent spreading. If time is limited, cut or weed-whack weeds before they seed, and return later to remove the entire plant. Be aware that any selective herbicide use will harm native plants if it comes into contact with them.</p>
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Collect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flowers that have dried or dropped petals 	Collect seeds from spent flowers and sow seeds directly back into the ground, where space allows them to fill in.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Prune/Trim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plants covering or blocking parts of paths and walkways 	If it is observed that plants are covering or blocking parts of walkways, cut back in order to clear the path.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Tree Limbs	<p>On trees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cross branching • limbs that pose safety issue • dead woody branches or stems 	While trees are leafed out, mark or flag limbs that are dead, crossing, or that pose a safety issue. Make plans to remove these in the fall or winter, while the tree is dormant.
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FALL

ESTABLISHMENT PERIOD (0-3 YEARS)

Goals:

- Manage plant material as it moves into dormancy in winter
- Prepare soils for next growing season
- Control weeds and pests before winter

Dwarf Rabbitbrush
Ericameria nauseosa ssp. nauseosa var. nauseosa



TASK	LOOK FOR	NOTES
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Check irrigation system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are spray heads watering all plants? • Is water spraying areas it should not like sidewalks or roadways? 	Continue to check all heads and irrigation lines for proper and consistent coverage. Replace broken and damaged irrigation parts if they are observed.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Rake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaves completely covering the ground 	If a large amount of leaf drop creates a thick mat, rake and remove the excess to prevent issues such as pests and disease. Leave a light layer of leaves—no more than a couple of inches—through spring to benefit soil health. Ideally, mow leaves in place to speed up decomposition and improve soil fertility.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Prune/Trim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plants covering or blocking parts of paths and walkways • Maintain clearance along paths. 	<p>Avoid cutting plants down completely. If an herbaceous plant is leggy or flopping, cut it down to 18"-24" height, and employ the "chop and drop" method by leaving the cut plant material on site, as the base of the plant, to a depth not to exceed 2"-3".</p> <p>For plantings that are adjacent to walkways and paths, trim all vegetation in the first 2'-3' feet of the landscape down to 18" to keep sightlines clear and access comfortable.</p>
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Weed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new sprouts that are unfamiliar, weeds 	Keep an eye out for new, cool season weeds emerging and pull them out of the landscape.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Install Fall Plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in planting 	Install fall plantings a minimum of 4 weeks before irrigation system is turned off for the year.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Plant Bulbs & Overseed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in planting 	Plant bulbs and overseed where desired.
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WINTER

ESTABLISHMENT PERIOD (0-3 YEARS)

Goals:

- Maintenance team prepares for the growing season
- Pruning occurs while trees and shrubs are still dormant

TASK	LOOK FOR	NOTES
<input type="checkbox"/> Prune	<p>On trees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cross branching • limbs that pose safety issue • dead or injured woody branches or stems <p>On shrubs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shrubs that need to be thinned 	<p>Prune deciduous trees (shade, ornamental, and fruit-bearing) in late Winter before buds emerge.</p> <p>Remove dead or injured branches, overly upright branches, crossing branches, and limbs that have been marked for removal from a prior season (see note in 'Summer' Pg. 14). Do not prune evergreens at this time.</p> <p>Cut selected limbs down to the crown of the shrub or the trunk of the tree. Never remove more than 1/3 of a tree or shrub and be careful not to remove the top of a tree. Avoid shearing shrubs as this damages shrubs in our climate.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil moisture 	<p>Feel the soil 2" below the surface to gauge how dry the soil is. Alternatively, use an inexpensive soil moisture probe to accurately monitor soil wetness.</p> <p>Our landscapes prefer about an inch of water every few weeks. (12" of snow = 1" of water).</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Water/Irrigate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry soils 	<p>If the winter has been especially warm and dry, water trees and shrubs during the middle of the day when temperatures are above 40°F. If the irrigation system is off, water by hand.</p> <p>General guideline: Apply about 10 gallons for trees and 5 gallons for shrubs every 3–5 weeks, adjusting for local weather conditions.</p> <p>Adjustments: Plants in full winter sun need more water than those in shade. Colder average temperatures (around 30°F) reduce water needs compared to warmer days (around 50°F).</p> <p>If the winter has been especially cold and snowy, delay watering until both air and soil temperatures rise above 40°F.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Wrap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree trunks of newly planted trees 	<p>Tree wrapping in winter protects young campus trees from sunscald and frost cracks. Maintenance staff can use breathable wraps or guards to keep trunks safe.</p>



SPRING

ESTABLISHMENT PERIOD (0-3 YEARS)

Goals:

- Team becomes familiar with new plant material
- Team is able to tell the difference between a new plant and a weed



Alpine Columbine
Aquilegia alpina

TASK	LOOK FOR	NOTES
<input type="checkbox"/> Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are spray heads watering all plants? • Is water spraying areas it should not like sidewalks or roadways? 	<p>Whenever possible, gently brush or shake heavy snow off trees, especially evergreen or fruit-bearing varieties</p> <p>After irrigation system has been turned on, assess all heads and irrigation lines for proper and consistent coverage. Replace broken and damaged irrigation parts as necessary.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Prune	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dead branches on woody plants • Cross-branching 	<p>Once leaves emerge, assess any remaining dead branches on woody plants and remove accordingly.</p> <p>Remove dead or injured wood on deciduous trees. Remove brown branches from evergreen trees. Prune evergreens for shape just before new growth begins in the spring.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil moisture 	<p>If soil feels dry, water by hand until irrigation system is turned on.</p> <p>Hand water until the irrigation system is turned on for the year or if it isn't functioning properly.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Weed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate early season weeds 	<p>Using the weed reference pages (pg. 20), identify new plants emerging. If the plant is determined to be a weed, remove the weed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pull by hand in smaller areas close to student use. • Apply spot treatment of herbicide in larger areas that are away from student use. <p>Be aware that any selective herbicide use will harm native plants if it comes into contact with them.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps or empty areas in planting 	<p>Check if there are gaps of more than 12" in planting. Install new plants from the correct plant palette list when soil temperatures allow.</p>

LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE

(3+ YEARS)

SUMMER LOOK FOR NOTES

<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Irrigation	Check heads and lines for anything in need of repair	After checking for breakage, continue to check for correct watering coverage—that the spray of water is reaching all plants.
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FALL LOOK FOR NOTES

<input type="checkbox"/>	Rake	A thick mat of leaves	Leave a light layer of leaves. Rake and remove excess leaves to prevent issues such as pests and disease.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Weed	New or established weeds	Determine weed removal method and apply to new or established weeds. Remove before the plant goes to seed.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Trim	Plants covering or blocking parts of paths and walkways	For plantings along walkways, trim vegetation within 2–3 feet of the walkway down to 18 inch height to maintain clear sightlines, ensure comfortable access, and prevent long-term encroachment into paths.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Irrigation	Check heads and lines for anything in need of repair	After checking for breakage, continue to check for correct watering coverage—that the spray of water is reaching all plants.
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WINTER LOOK FOR NOTES

<input type="checkbox"/>	Inspect Irrigation	Once before freeze	Check and repair irrigation to prevent freeze damage and leaks.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Prune	Once during winter	Remove dead, damaged, or crossing branches to maintain plant structure.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Clear	If leaves or plant material are completely covering the ground (a thick mat of leaves)	Remove fallen leaves and debris to reduce disease pressure and improve site cleanliness.
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SPRING LOOK FOR NOTES

<input type="checkbox"/>	Increase & Monitor Irrigation	Establishment of plants—at year 2 or 3 after plant installation	Once plants are established, gradually increase irrigation. Water once per month, targeting 0.5 - 1" each time you water, or if soil feels dry at 2" depth.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Prune	Evergreens, (see the 0-3 year/ establishment spring section)	Prune evergreens for shape just before new growth begins in the spring.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Weed	New or established weeds	Determine removal method and apply to new or established weeds. Weed before the plant goes to seed.
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Plant Health	Plants that are doing well or are struggling, gaps in planting	Determine if plants are struggling. Check that the plant is the right plant in the right place in terms of sun or shade and refer to the plant palettes provided for that area; check that plants are being watered the correct amount (not too much or too little). Determine if the plant needs to be replaced and if a different species should be selected.
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KEY TAKEAWAYS!



Take care of plants even after they are established. This means:

- Prune and trim as needed.
- Divide plants that are too big.
- Add mulch to keep the right depth.
- Watch for pests and treat them if needed.
- Water less when the weather allows.
- Replace plants that have died (*Referencing the Sustainable Landscapes Manual plant palettes*).
- Thin or move plants that are too crowded.
- Check that all plants are healthy.

Even strong, established plants can have problems in some years, so keep checking on them regularly.

COMMON WEED I.D.

SPRING



Taraxacum officinale
Dandelion



Convolvulus arvensis
Bindweed



Tratopogon dubius
Western Salsify



Malva spp.
Mallow



Chenopodium album
Lambsquarters



Medicago lupulina
Black medic



Kochia scoparia
Kochia



Lactuca serriola
Prickly Lettuce



Brassica rapa
Birdrape mustard

COMMON WEED I.D.

SUMMER



Portulaca oleracea
Purslane



Tribulus terrestris
Puncture Vine



Cichorium intybus
Chicory



Euphorbia maculata
Spotted Spurge



Cirsium arvense
Canada Thistle



Senecio vulgaris
Common groundsel



Lepidium draba
Whitetop



Sonchus spp.
Sowthistle



Saponaria officinalis
Bouncingbet

COMMON WEED I.D.

SUMMER



Conyza bonariensis
Hairy fleabane



Plantago major
Broadleaf plantain



Cynodon dactylon
Bermudagrass



Campuanula rapunculoides
Creeping bellflower



Digitaria sanguinalis
Large crabgrass



Erodium cicutarium
Redstem filaree

MAINTENANCE RESOURCES

- [City of Denver Native Plant Community Irrigation Schedule](#)
- [Colorado Native Pollinating Insects Study](#)
- [Colorado Wildlife Federation](#)
- [Creating Pollinator Habitat \(CSU Extension\)](#)
- [Denver Parks and Recreation's Native Seeding Spec \(§32 92 20\)](#)
- [Kelli Dolecek's "Month-to-Month Gardening, Colorado", 1998](#)
- [Late Winter the Best Time to Prune Trees \(CSU Extension\)](#)
- [National Wildlife Federation](#)
- [Native Plant Revegetation Guide for Colorado](#)
- [Native Shrubs for Colorado Landscapes \(CSU Extension\)](#)
- [Pollinator Partnership's Regional Guide](#)
- [Western Native Seed \(Coaldale, CO\)](#)
- [Xerces Society's Recommendations for Native Plants for Pollinators and Other Beneficial Insects](#)