

CATEGORY	SITE EVALUATION / QUALITY ASSURANCE
INTENT	Demonstrate knowledge and skill of documenting project maintenance, meeting the designed and specified landscape quality.
APPROACH	<p>Quality Assurance procedures are established for the most consistent, reliable and cost-effective landscape solutions. Attention to detail and informative communication and documentation skills ensure quality maintenance and project completion, critical to achieving customer satisfaction. This section promotes knowledge and tools for regularly scheduled, frequent site inspections designed to evaluate the quality of installation and maintenance.</p> <p>Quality landscapes develop as a result of good design and installations, plus adherence to environmental management practices, such as the Florida Yards and Neighborhood program and the Florida Friendly™ Best Management Practices.</p>
TESTING PROCEDURES	<p>On a site provided during the exam, accurately document the maintenance quality of landscape elements, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper pruning is used to maintain designed function • Site is free of pests (insect, disease, fungus) • Site is free of dead, dying or stressed plants or turf • Site is free from litter • Bedlines are maintained as designed. • Hardscapes needs, including cleaning and repair of water features, retaining walls, benches or pavers • Mulch is uneven or not the correct depth • Plant stems and trunks are covered with mulch • Plants are set above or below grade • Plants are not removed from containers • Tags and flags are left on plants or in the landscape • Broken branches on plants
BACKGROUND	<p><i>Six Practices of Low Maintenance Landscape Design and Installation</i></p> <p>There are a wide variety of terms and principles for responsible landscape practices. It is common sense and may serve as the beginning of a checklist for future landscape projects.</p> <p><i>1. Responsible Design</i> A responsible landscape design responds to the site conditions, existing vegetation and topography – the natural features of the land. Responsible landscape design is a broad term that refers primarily to the selection and arrangement of plants to serve one or more purposes. Emphasis should be placed on</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) matching plants to their site conditions b) choosing plants which have few cultural and physical maintenance requirements c) choosing plants which are tolerant of local pests d) situating plants to facilitate maintenance treatments <p>In addition to assessing the area's growing conditions, a responsible landscape design anticipates and designs for intended uses, comfort, safety and preferences of the client. Landscapes are dynamic. A responsible landscape design will accommodate and even highlight plant growth and seasonal variety</p>

in a design. High visibility areas may demand the highest maintenance and water use to provide interest and color where people spend more time.

Responsible landscape design is sensitive to the environment. Design intentions do not end with installation but only come to fruition if the landscape is maintained with a clear vision of the original design and responsible design.

2. Proper plant selection and placement

Responsible plant selection depends on understanding the plants and the specific conditions of the site. Consider each plant's mature height and width, its need for sun, shade, soil and water, and its tolerance to cold or salt. Preserve as many existing trees and shrubs as possible, provided they're healthy and the root systems are not significantly impacted by construction. Properly selected vegetation appropriately placed will remain healthy with minimal supplemental irrigation and care, once established. Design and maintain the landscape with areas of differing water demands, referred to as "hydrozoning." In addition, replacement plants should be resistant to disease and pests.

General Plant Selection and Placement Guidelines

- Hydrozone plants, grouped by water needs.
- Use plants that are tolerant to the environmental and site conditions (sun, shade, soil and water) and its tolerance to cold or salt.
- Choose pest resistant plants.
- Arrange plants in beds; avoiding scattered landscape elements.
- Include limited or no plants with excessive dropping of leaves, fruits, or seed pods that become excessive litter.
- Include limited or no plants that are a pruning burden or that overgrow the intended space – know plant's mature height and width.
- Control and remove invasive plant species.
- Protect threatened and endangered species.
- Select and place plants that are Florida #1 or better.
- Plan for seasonal variety

3. Irrigate efficiently

As common sense would dictate, group plants based on their water needs. Put moisture-loving plants in moist areas and plants that prefer well-drained sites in drier areas. Plant shade trees to lower the air and soil temperatures. This will reduce soil moisture loss. Only irrigate when plants need water or when rain has been inadequate and use the right irrigation system and proper sprinkler head for each area.

General Efficient Irrigation Guidelines

- Group together plants that may need irrigation so that water is only used in limited areas.
- Plant shade trees in landscape beds to lower the air and soil temperatures. This will reduce soil moisture loss.
- Turf and landscape beds are on separate zones with separate valves.
- Micro-irrigation is used for landscape beds.
- Irrigation schedules are programmed for early morning watering.
- Irrigation schedules adjusted for establishment, and seasonal maintenance
- Florida law required rain shutoff device or sensor is installed in an open area and operational.
- Florida law-required backflow prevention device is installed.
- Irrigation lines should be installed at a depth where aeration and other lawn maintenance will not interfere with them.

4. Mulch

Mulch provides a cover over the soil, reducing evaporation, soil temperature, and erosion. It also limits weed growth and competition for water and nutrients. Landscape mulch materials vary in their suitability for various uses. Any mulch requires maintenance. Organic mulches decompose and must be renewed. Inorganic mulches must be cleaned.

Mulch should be spread around shrubs and trees and on flower beds, 3 inches thick, keeping mulch from coming into direct contact with plant stems. When mulching trees, cover the exposed sides of the root ball around but not on the root ball. Mulch on top of the root ball can retain water meant for the root system, provide habitat for animals that can injure the bark, and encourage formation of stem girdling roots. There is no good reason for forming a small, deep mulch layer around the tree, often referred to as 'volcano' mulching. It can harm the tree trunk and may cover extra soil that has been piled around the trunk after planting.

5. Appropriate use of turf

One of the most controversial and misunderstood principles is the concept of appropriate turf. It is often a yard's largest water user, but it can still play a role in a water-conserving landscape. Use turf where it is most functional in the landscape plan, such as where children or pets will play, or for intended light foot traffic. In other areas, consider more water-thrifty alternatives such as groundcovers, mulched walkways or hardscapes.

Turf is easy to maintain, although it requires more frequent care than many other landscape plants. It is an important element in cooling the local environment, reducing erosion and preventing glare from the sun. Consider where and how large a turf area is desired, how it will be used, and during which seasons it will be used.

6. Maintenance

Maintenance is necessary in any landscape and cannot be neglected or underfunded. The design must consider long term maintenance and responsibly project long term maintenance requirements. Any landscape will require some maintenance: pruning, removing trash that has blown into the landscape, occasional weeding and pest management, checking that the irrigation system is functioning properly, and adjusting automatic irrigation systems as the seasons change.

Keep plants healthy. Too much water and fertilizer promote weak growth, as well as increase pruning and mowing requirements. Remove weeds by hand before they get established and crowd out the plants you want. Watch for pests and make sure they're truly a problem before waging war, then do it organically whenever possible.

Maintenance practices are interconnected to each other, so maintain for overall long-lasting healthy landscapes. For example, mowing height has a tremendous impact on the severity of weed, insect, and disease pressure on turfgrasses by causing turfgrass stress.

Low maintenance designs that are wisely and holistically maintained offer a way to have beautiful, livable landscapes without excess demand on resources. It can accommodate comfortable and pleasing intimate landscapes, while investing less water on parts of the landscape in which we spend less time. The application of these seven principles will create landscapes that are more compatible with the environment and bottom line.