



A Successful Spring Landscape Starts Now

By Justin White

Communities and residents are paying attention to their landscapes now more than ever. California's persistent drought and the desire to be more sustainable are key factors when changes need to be made. Climate change has accentuated landscape challenges by creating dramatic and forceful swings in weather events including, most recently, destructive climatic rivers wreaking havoc throughout much of California and the western states.

People also realize a clear connection between mental health and the landscape. When the landscape is beautiful and thriving, it can enhance mental well-being and a sense of happiness. Spring is a beautiful time of the year for enjoying the landscape: flowers are blooming, the grass is green, and the trees are budding with new growth. The flip side is that weeds are starting to pop up, gopher activity is high, the late spring rains taper off, and the hot weather dries out those green lawns. Here are ten tips on how an HOA community can plan for a successful spring.

1. HOAs should start by reviewing their landscape contracts. Boards should understand what is included in the contract and make sure the landscape vendor is performing the work per the contract. Many contracts include spring

start-up of irrigation systems, mulch installation, and fertilizer applications. Before requesting additional work, the HOA board should know what is currently in the contract.

2. A full assessment of the irrigation system should be requested, along with recommended improvements and repairs. If the landscape vendor does not have a certified landscape irrigation auditor (CLIA) on staff, an outside vendor should be hired to perform this technical assessment. This will allow an unbiased assessment of the property with a list of suggested repairs and improvements. It may be wise to have an irrigation or water management company perform this work if the landscape vendor is not appropriately staffed. This assessment should be conducted before February 15, to allow work to be completed before the summer heat.
3. Mulch should be applied to all landscaped areas at a minimum depth of three inches. Depending on the current condition, different amounts of mulch may be required, but it is good practice to add mulch every year.

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The benefits include better weed control, increased water retention, higher organic matter and nitrogen content in the soil, and a better appearance.

4. The site should be reviewed for potential tripping hazards. Over time, tree roots and shifting soil can cause cracked concrete or uneven pathways. This is a good time to review the community's safety status and fix any tripping or falling hazards.
5. All fences and gates should be stable and in good working order. Fences, like anything else, have a life span and can often be neglected due to their location on the back side of the property or in other hard-to-see areas. The HOA should make sure no fencing sections are falling or becoming unstable.
6. By this point in winter, any drainage issues have usually been made known. Most repairs completed in the winter are "Band-aids" to get the community through the season. The HOA should develop long-term solutions and have work performed before it's too late and winter has set in again.
7. The planting areas should be freshened up with some color. Main entrances and around the clubhouse are great areas in which to invest in fresh plantings for spring. Bids should be requested from the landscape vendor now. The bids should then be presented to the board for approval and the development of a plan of action for spring.
8. Overall plant health care is important. Communities and landscape vendors often forget the basics of plant health care, leaving the plants, grass, and trees starving for nutrients. For example, large specimen trees should receive extra attention. Arborists recommend injecting the soil around these trees with liquid fertilizer to help them thrive in the spring and summer months. Different plants have different needs. The HOA can request a meeting

with the landscape company if there is uncertainty regarding fertilization or specific plant care.

9. The HOA should have a tree hazard assessment performed by a certified arborist. The projects revealed by this report should be addressed based on severity. A certified arborist will help provide a game plan to get the community into a safe condition.
10. Fire prevention should always be on the agenda. It is smart to know the areas of the community that may be at high risk for developing fire hazards and have a plan to mitigate these hazards. These areas should be monitored in the coming months, and if they become a fire hazard, the plan can then be executed. If there is a need for clarity regarding fire prevention, communities can reach out to their local fire department for guidance.

Performing the steps above will provide for a more sustainable community. A happy, healthy, and resilient landscape can provide many great benefits, including improved carbon offsetting and cleaner air. The best thing about investing in the landscape is that people can see the difference. Communities can feel good about what they're doing while enhancing the lives of residents.



From climbing on his father's work truck as a child to being the second-generation CEO of their rapidly growing family company, Justin White is taking the landscaping industry by storm. At just 33 years of age, White has led K&D Landscaping Inc. on an exponential journey of growth, culture creation, and community giveback and is raising the bar in the landscape industry. White is active with several nonprofits, sits on the board of the Monterey Peninsula College Horticulture Committee, is an advisor to County Park Friends Santa Cruz, and is a member of Cabrillo College's President's Advisory Committee.

