

# Hiring a Landscape Contractor



## What's the Problem?

Local governments are actively working to protect their water resources through daily activities. However, many of the activities performed on municipal property are often done by contractors. If contractors do not follow good practices, local water resources can become polluted, undoing other investments in clean water.

Following is sample language that a municipality can consider including when hiring a landscape contractor. The language needs to be tailored to meet the specific needs of each community.

## Low-cost solutions

When hiring a contractor, stipulate that they commit to implementing simple techniques that minimize the possibility of polluting surface waters.

## Overall Specifications

- The contractor is encouraged to attend training sessions to learn techniques they can use to protect area water resources while performing maintenance on municipal property. (Participation in this training should be undertaken at no additional charge to the municipality).

## Mowing

- Mowers designed to mulch grass clippings shall be used. Grass clippings are to be left on the lawn and removed from paved/hard surfaces. All clumps of cut grass are to be worked into the lawn or removed and disposed of in accordance with state law. Under no condition must lawn clippings be allowed to go down storm drains or disposed of in drainage ditches or water courses. Grass clippings should be removed from all paved areas.
- Mowers should be adjusted to a setting that leaves the grass blade at least 3" tall on HIGH maintenance properties; 3-3.5" tall on MEDIUM maintenance properties; and 3.5-4" tall on LOW maintenance properties. This shades out weeds and encourages deep root growth in the turf.
- Mower blades are to be kept sharp. Dull blades will tear grass. In turn, this condition will require more watering and increases the opportunity for disease.
- To the extent possible, mowing is to only occur when the grass is dry.
- Let grass grow a few inches higher in depressed areas or on steep slopes.
- Try to avoid using gas-powered equipment on ozone action days.

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When developing the lawn care specifications, consider providing a map and criteria of low, medium, and high maintenance areas. A high maintenance area may be in front of the municipal office vs. a low maintenance area may be certain parts of a park (e.g., near water bodies, areas of passive recreation). Taking the time to divide spaces into high, medium, and low maintenance will save you money and clarify expectations to the contractor.

### *Mowing Setbacks*

- Unless otherwise instructed by the designated municipal contact, minimum mowing setback areas shall be maintained around all waterways: approximately 10' on HIGH maintenance properties; approximately 15 -25' on MEDIUM maintenance properties; and greater than 25' on LOW maintenance properties.

### *Trimming*

- The contractor is responsible for trimming around all surface features such as light poles, trees, planting beds, fences, playground equipment, and headstones. Care will be taken not to damage the bark on trees and shrubs (especially 'thin barked' species) or to damage surface features such as wooden fence posts.

### *Mulch*

- All trees, shrubs, perennial beds, and mulch areas shall be mulched annually. Mulching shall be applied and maintained at a minimum depth of 2 inches and a maximum depth of 3 inches. All trees shall have a wood mulch ring established. This ring shall be a minimum of 3 feet in diameter and a maximum of 10 feet in diameter. Mulch shall be kept 3 inches away from the trunk at all times.
- Mulch leaves into the grass whenever possible. In HIGH maintenance areas, the surface of the grass should maintain a neat appearance.

### *Fertilizer Application & Use*

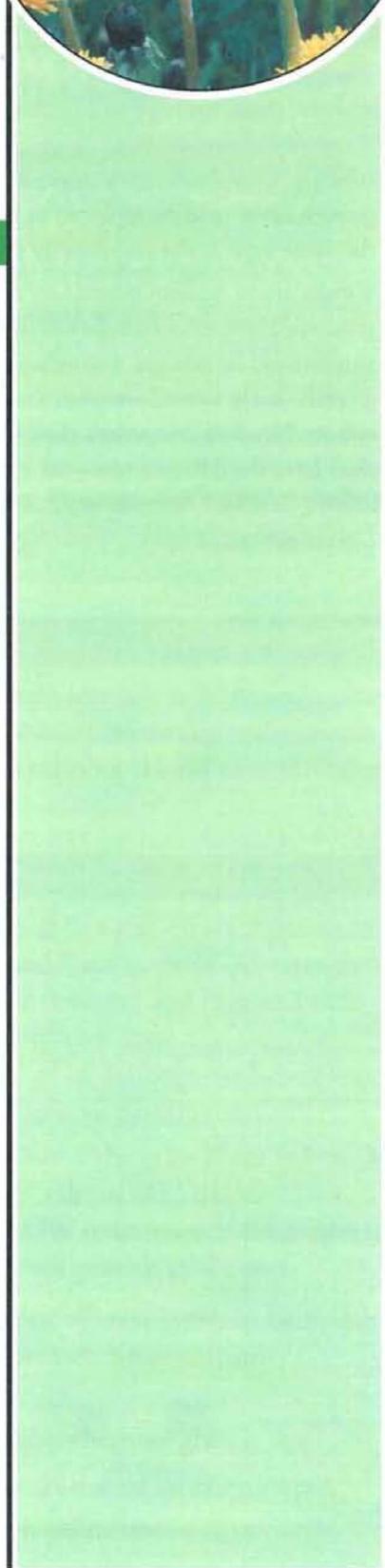
- Fertilizer shall be applied in a manner that minimizes the potential of fertilizer entering any lake, stream, river, sewer, drain, wetland, or natural watercourse.
- Fertilizer shall never be applied to frozen ground.
- Fertilizer shall be kept off all paved or otherwise impervious surfaces. To prevent fertilizer from washing into the storm drain, all fertilizer will be immediately swept or blown back onto the turf areas.
- Fertilizers are not to be applied immediately before an anticipated heavy rainfall event or during a heavy rainfall event.
- Fertilizers shall not be placed within the mowing setback areas or within twenty-five (25) feet of a lake, stream, river, wetland, or watercourse, unless otherwise authorized by the designated municipal contact person.

### *Fertilizer Selection*

- Slow-release nitrogen fertilizer shall be used. Use a turf fertilizer that applies one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet.
- As long as the ground is not frozen or snow covered, one of the fertilizer applications will occur in the fall, preferably in November (use a soluble form of nitrogen).
- Unless a new lawn is being established, or there is a phosphorus (P) deficiency, only low or no phosphorus (P) fertilizers shall be used. One way to tell the phosphorus level is through a soil test. Low phosphorus fertilizers are fertilizers that have a nitrogen to phosphorus content ratio of 5 to 1, or greater.

### *Pest/Weed Control*

- It is the municipalities desire that an Integrated Pest Management program (IPM) be established/followed. The predominate goal of the IPM program is to use a combination of mechanical, cultural, biological, chemical and regulatory management tactics in a compatible manner to maintain pest densities below unacceptable thresholds established by the municipality. The contractor is responsible for monitoring of insects, vertebrates, invertebrates, pathogens, fungi, diseases, blights, infectious agents, mildews, rots, rusts, wilts, weeds, and other disorders caused by pests. In a manner consistent with an IPM program, the contractor shall control pest threshold populations/conditions and implement the controls necessary to control biotic and abiotic agents that exist on contracted sites. The IPM program shall be set up and maintained by a Certified Pesticide Applicator in accordance with the municipality's IPM goals and policy. Once the IPM program has been established, the contractor will advise the municipality as to how the specifics of the program are to be met, coordination of timing of applications, and safety precautions being taken.
- Pesticides shall be applied in a manner as to minimize the potential of any amount of chemical entering any lake, stream, river, sewer, drain, wetland, or any natural watercourse.
- Pesticides shall not be placed within the defined mowing setback areas or within twenty-five (25) feet of a lake, stream, river, wetland, or watercourse, unless otherwise authorized by designated municipal contact person.
- Small weed or pest problems should be controlled using spot treating with a ready to use product. Contact the local community prior to dealing with large scale pest/weed problems to determine the best course of action.
- All pesticide and herbicide applications shall be made by a Certified Pesticide Applicator in accordance with the municipality's IPM goals and policy.
- The contractor will provide copies of all labels and material safety data sheets of all fertilizer, herbicides, and pesticides used on municipal property.
- The contractor will provide the information needed to maintain the IPM recordkeeping in accordance with the municipality's IPM goals and policy.



### *Litter/Debris*

- On the same schedule as mowing, the contractor shall be responsible for removal of all litter and debris from all contracted sites. This includes removing debris from around catch basins in areas where it is safe to access catch basins (e.g, parking lots, streets with low traffic flow, etc).

### *Pruning*

- The contractor shall prune all trees to their intended growth form, removing all suckers, dead, broken, and/or crossing over branches. The contractor shall meet with the designated municipal representative to determine “intended growth form” prior to any pruning activity. Plants pruned in a manner inconsistent with the “intended growth form” will be replaced at the contractor’s expense with similar size plants of the same type as the improperly pruned plants.
- Shrubs are to be kept pruned to their intended form. All winter damage is to be removed from trees and shrubs in March of each year. Early flowering trees and shrubs shall be pruned immediately after flowering to encourage next years bud growth. Early to mid-summer flowering plants shall be pruned during their dormant season. Needled evergreens shall be pruned anytime the wood is not frozen. Annuals shall have dead flower removed whenever necessary to enhance the appearance of the bed. A Certified Arborist shall perform all pruning in a safe, professional manner. Debris generated during pruning is to be removed from the site the same day.



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### **Resources**

City of Troy Bid Proposal.

Healthy Lawn and Garden Technical Advisory Committee.  
*Example Municipal Lawn Care Specifications*. 2006.

Funding provided by Designated Management Agencies and SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.