# SAMLARC
# LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

BOARD ADOPTED AUGUST 25, 2026

## COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

The Rancho Santa Margarita Landscape and Recreation Corporation (SAMLARC) is a master-planned community located in Southern Orange County at the base of the Santa Ana Mountains. The community was established in 1986 and includes 13,646 homes (comprised of a mix of single-family, multi-family, and apartment communities. SAMLARC's ownership and maintenance responsibilities include 12 parks, 1 Lake (33 million gallons and 1.1-mile circumference), a sand-bottom swim lagoon, 9 trails, 4 Jr. Olympic-size pools, and over 350 acres of landscape. The SAMLARC Board of Directors has proudly pioneered a community philosophy that places Members' quality of life at the center of SAMLARC's operations. SAMLARC's Best Management Practices (BMPs) reinforce the Association's commitment to managing the community through responsible stewardship.

## LEADER IN COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE STRATEGIES

SAMLARC consistently implements large-scale landscape projects that benefit the quality of life and the aesthetics of our community, often well before such practices become required. Notable actions include a turf replacement program that reduced site-specific water needs by 40-60%, decreased fertilizer requirements, and lowered labor costs by approximately $100K per year (2024). Implementing large-scale wildfire defensible space (2021) protected residents from massive fire insurance increases – at no cost to the Association. A state-funded loan (forgiven via achieved conservation goals) paved the way for one of the first and largest centralized irrigation systems in the US (2015). The Green Trees for the Golden State grant funded the installation of 1,100 trees along the streets to reduce carbon load (2006). An active Tree Population Inventory shares a bird's-eye view of the species and quantities of SAMLARC trees. Green waste such as clippings and branches are sent to specialized facilities to create mulch that returns to the site and promotes healthy soil and slow evaporation – as well as a net-zero impact at the landfill. All of these complex operations work in tandem to support achieving SAMLARC's goals of providing viable landscapes.

## VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

Landscape stewardship focused on safety and aesthetics are core components of SAMLARC's philosophy. Historically, SAMLARC's overall approach to landscape has reduced the use of synthetic product interventions to only cases where all other methods have been exhausted, and no other alternatives are available. Core landscape controls have significantly reduced the potential need for herbicide/plant growth product interventions. These include: choosing a Mediterranean plant palette (which mirrors California's seasons); season-specific projects to mitigate unhealthy ecosystems; manual/mechanical weed removal; and considerable reduction of turf grass (and associated water usage) in the community. Many of these projects have been completed at little to no cost to the Association thanks to rebate programs. These strategic decisions have made it easier to manage SAMLARC's landscapes without reliance on chemical interventions.

## BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

To support the continued success of SAMLARC's landscape strategies, the following Best Management Practices outline the proper materials and operations for safe and efficient landscape management. The components include:

- Pollution Prevention
- Mowing, Trimming/Weeding, and Planting
- Managing Landscape Waste
- Fertilizer and Pesticide Management
- Irrigation
- Erosion Control

## POLLUTION PREVENTION

The proactive implementation of pollution prevention and water-efficiency measures maximizes the environmental health of the HOA common areas, reduces long-term operational expenses, and ensures the community remains compliant with strict state environmental regulations with focus on the following mandated and recommended sustainable practices:

- Choose low-water-use flowers, trees, shrubs, and groundcover.
- Time operations to preserve the landscape's water efficiency (e.g., properly-timed weeding, pruning, pest control and fertilizing).
- Continue to educate landscape staff on pollution prevention measures.
- Enforce Nonfunctional Turf (NFT) Potable Water Phase-Out: Transition decorative, non-recreational grass in common areas to climate-resilient landscaping to comply with California's AB 1572 timeline, which explicitly prohibits using drinkable water for purely ornamental turf.
- Select Climate-Adapted Plants: Require any common area modifications or approved homeowner architectural upgrades to prioritize native, low-water-use flowers, shrubs, and trees.
- Adopt Smart Irrigation Technologies: Deploy weather-based smart controllers and check-valves to prevent irrigation overspray, eliminating urban non-point source pollution from washing into the association's storm drain system.
- Implement Integrated Pest Management (IPM): Direct landscaping vendors to use biological or cultural weed and pest control methods first. This minimizes the application of synthetic fertilizers and chemical pesticides that can wash into municipal waterways.
- Deploy Stormwater Best Management Practices: Ensure routine maintenance of the community's catch basins, bioswales, and drainage infrastructure to keep fertilizer, sediment, and trash from entering the watershed.
- Incorporate On-Site Organic Waste Management: Mandate grasscycling, natural mulching, and the recycling of organic debris to meet SB 1383 organic waste diversion standards, building healthy soil that captures rainfall naturally.
- Deliver Community and Staff Outreach: Continuously educate residents on pet waste management and brief maintenance staff on state-mandated water allocation metrics (MAWA) and pesticide reporting compliance.

## MOWING, TRIMMING/WEEDING, AND PLANTING

- Whenever possible, mow or use mechanical methods of vegetation removal.

- Use hand weeding where practical.
- Use coarsely-textured mulches or geotextiles to suppress weed growth.
- When conducting mechanical or manual weed control, avoid loosening the soil, which could erode into streams or storm drains.
- Do not blow or rake leaves, etc. into the street or place yard waste in gutters or on dirt shoulders. Sweep up any leaves, litter, or residue in gutters or on the street.
- Collect lawn and garden clippings, pruning waste, tree trimmings, and weeds. Chip if necessary, and mulch if possible. Compost or dispose of at a landfill (see Waste Management section).
- Place temporarily stockpiled material away from watercourses, and berm or cover stockpiles to prevent material releases to storm drains.
- Where feasible, retain and/or plant selected native vegetation whose features are determined to be beneficial. Native vegetation usually requires less maintenance (e.g., irrigation, fertilizer) than ornamental vegetation.
- When planting or replanting, consider using low-water-use groundcovers.

## IRRIGATION

- Inspect irrigation system periodically to ensure that the right amount of water is being applied and that excessive runoff does not occur.
- Minimize excess watering, and repair leaks in the irrigation system as soon as they are observed.
- Use timers appropriately or a drip system to prevent runoff, and then only irrigate as much as is needed.
- Utilize water delivery rates that do not exceed the infiltration rate of the soil.
- Use popup sprinkler heads in areas with high pedestrian traffic or where pipes could become damaged.
- Consider the use of mechanisms that reduce water flow to sprinkler heads if broken.
- If the bailing of muddy water is required (e.g. when repairing a water line leak), do not pour in the storm drain; pour over landscaped areas.
- If reclaimed water is used for irrigation, ensure that there is no runoff from the landscaped areas.
- System Inspections: Conduct regular, structured landscape and irrigation maintenance inspections to verify that the irrigation efficiency meets or exceeds the required 0.75 for overhead spray and 0.81 for drip systems, completely eliminating overspray and low-head drainage runoff.

- Leak Management: Repair all visible leaks immediately. If a leak or structural break cannot be instantly fixed, the affected zone must be isolated using manual or master shut-off valves to prevent any water waste.
- Smart Scheduling and Drip Controls: Manage irrigation exclusively through automatic Smart Irrigation Controllers (utilizing evapotranspiration or soil moisture sensor data) and utilize dedicated drip irrigation zones to perfectly align water delivery with real-time plant needs while halting surface runoff.
- Riser and Pipe Protection: Install swing joints or other flexible riser-protection components on all sprinkler heads in high-traffic or vehicle-adjacent areas to shield pipes and prevent catastrophic physical damage.
- Flow and Pressure Regulation: Equip the system with flow sensors and master shut-off valves that automatically detect high-flow anomalies (like a broken head) and shut down the system. Additionally, install integral check valves and pressure-regulating bodies to eliminate low-head drainage and misting.
- Dewatering and Discharges: Divert and filter any muddy dewatering discharge resulting from line repairs to a stabilized, permeable landscaped area or retention basin; do not allow sediment-laden water to violate local stormwater BMPs by entering the storm drain.
- Recycled/Reclaimed Water Use: Designate recycled water zones as a Special Landscape Area (SLA). Ensure the system strictly complies with local Title 22 rules, running entirely off a dedicated irrigation meter without any overspray or runoff onto non-targeted public areas

## FERTILIZER AND PESTICIDE MANAGEMENT

### GENERAL

- Utilize SAMLARC's comprehensive management system that incorporates integrated pest management techniques.
- SAMLARC avoids using chemical products in its other landscape zones unless all other prudent alternatives have been exhausted. In these cases, licensed vendors apply only the minimum amount needed for effectiveness to the targeted areas. Products are limited to those approved by the Orange County Department of Agriculture.
- Submit all requests for fertilizer/pesticide usage to the SAMLARC Landscape Consultant and SAMLARC for authorization.
- Follow all federal, state, and local laws and regulations governing the use, storage, and disposal of fertilizers and pesticides and training of applicators and pest control advisors.

- Educate and train employees on use of pesticides and in pesticide application techniques to prevent pollution.
- Pesticide application must be under the supervision of a California-licensed pesticide applicator.
- When applicable, use the least toxic pesticides that will be effective. Avoid use of copper-based pesticides if possible. The use of glyphosates was prohibited beginning in 2019.
- Prepare the minimum amount of pesticide needed for the job and use the lowest rate that will effectively control the pest.
- Do not mix or prepare pesticides or fertilizers for application near storm drains.
- Employ application techniques that minimize off-target or excessive application (e.g. spray drift), including consideration of alternative application techniques.
- Periodically test soils to determine proper fertilizer use.
- Reduce the use of high-nitrogen fertilizers that produce excess growth and therefore require more frequent mowing or trimming.
- Sweep pavement and sidewalk if fertilizer is spilled on these surfaces before applying irrigation water.
- Inspect pesticide/fertilizer equipment and transportation vehicles daily.

## SCHEDULING

- Do not use pesticides if rain is expected within 24 hours.
- Apply pesticides only when wind speeds are low (less than 5 mph).
- Coordinate community notices with SAMLARC's Landscape Consultant and Management; notice of major projects and product applications should be posted to the SAMLARC website 15 days prior to work; site-specific signage should comply with EPA requirements. Product notices are also available at the SAMLARC Offices.

## DISPOSAL

- Purchase only the amount of pesticide that can reasonably be used in a given time period (as needed; product-dependent).
- Triple-rinse containers, and use rinse water as product. Dispose of unused pesticide as hazardous waste.
- Dispose of empty pesticide containers according to the instructions on the container label.

# WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Compost leaves, sticks, and other collected vegetation, or dispose of at a permitted landfill.
- Inspect drainage facilities to detect illegal dumping of clippings/cuttings in or near these facilities. Properly dispose of any materials found.
- Do not dispose of collected vegetation into waterways or storm drainage systems.
- Place temporarily stockpiled material away from watercourses and storm drain inlets, and berm or cover stockpiles to prevent material releases to the storm drain system.
- Landscape waste in and around storm drain inlets should be avoided by either using bagging equipment or by manually picking up the material

## EROSION CONTROL

- Maintain vegetative cover on medians and embankments to prevent soil erosion.
- Apply mulch or leave clippings to serve as additional cover for soil stabilization and to reduce the velocity of stormwater runoff.
- Minimize the use of disking as the practice may result in erodible, barren soil.
- Confine excavated materials to pervious surfaces away from storm drain inlets, sidewalks, pavement, and ditches.
- Materials must be covered if rain is expected.

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