

Landscape Design Guide for Small Residential Sites



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This document is intended to:

- Set expectations for quality landscape design for developments with three or more dwelling units in the R-CG and H-GO districts
- Complement the landscaping regulations contained in Land Use Bylaw 1P2007
- Be referenced by development permit applicants to ensure a high quality, functional landscape design is achieved

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Design guide: **Landscaping small residential sites**



Why is landscape design important on small residential sites?

The purpose of this landscape design guide for small residential sites with three or more dwelling units is to provide flexible design direction that reflects the objectives and policies of Calgary's Municipal Development Plan. Development should complement the context of the surrounding community and use landscape design approaches to define public and private spaces. Landscape design is particularly important on small residential sites, as outdoor space is limited and high-quality design can ensure spaces are well used, cared for by residents and contribute to pleasant streetscapes for Calgarians to enjoy.

Site layout

①

Building location

Flexibility in building layout and massing offers the opportunity to design high-quality amenity spaces, setback areas and streetscapes. Locate buildings and upper storey massing to maximize sunlight access for amenity spaces and neighbouring parcels and provide space for layered landscaped areas and complementary setback and streetscape design. Consider the location of adjacent yard space and buildings. Where feasible, align buildings with neighbouring buildings, and amenity spaces and landscaped areas with neighbouring yards.



Setback design animates the streetscape and defines semi-private space.

2 Site design and circulation

Pathways provide opportunities for neighbours to meet, socialize and rest, promoting well-being and social connection. Where feasible, incorporate seating and small gathering spaces into site features like raised planters, retaining walls, stairs and stoops. Common pathways should be barrier-free and made of a hard surfaced material that meets standards of universal design.

Emphasize common entrances to the development using architectural and landscape design elements such as, but not limited to, trees and shrubs, accent lighting and pergolas. Publicly accessible pathways, such as those used by visitors, should be clearly visible from the sidewalk. Provide a wayfinding system, such as a map of the development or arrows alongside addresses, and prominently display unit numbers on sites where dwelling units and suites are not visible from the sidewalk.

Ensure sufficient pathway width is provided for comfortable use by people with mobility aids, bicycles, strollers, groceries, etc., especially where pathways are adjacent to encroachments such as downspouts, utility meters and window wells.



Generous pathways that connect to the public sidewalk, enhanced with planting areas and unique address signs, lead residents and visitors to units accessed from the outdoor amenity space.



3 Site services

Site and building services should be screened from the sidewalk and from amenity spaces. Consideration should be given to the location of waste and recycling areas; they should not be located next to amenity spaces or unit entrances. Transformers, HVAC units, utility meters and waste and recycling bins should be screened from the street and amenity spaces using architectural and/or landscape elements. Each unit is not required to have its own bins. More information can be found here: [Get, replace, or fix a blue, green or black cart](#) (calgary.ca)

Waste and recycling storage is conveniently located for easy access and screened with planting and/or architectural elements that match other site features.



Amenity space

①

Common and private amenity spaces

Outdoor common and private amenity spaces offer the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and enhance local community identity in Calgary.

Amenity spaces provide important areas for recreation and socializing. These areas should be located and designed to provide residents with access to sun and shade and opportunities for four-season use.

Common and private amenity spaces should be sized to be usable by residents; oddly shaped, disconnected amenity spaces are discouraged.

Amenity space hard landscape materials should meet standards of universal design. The use of gravel and asphalt is discouraged. The use of lighter coloured building and paving materials and softer textures, such as wood, are encouraged where spaces are narrow and/or shady.

Opportunities to incorporate local materials and/or features, such as gates and privacy screens designed by local artists, are encouraged. Such features can contribute to the unique identity of small residential developments and make them more visually interesting for residents and visitors.

Private amenity spaces are sized and located to encourage frequent use. Strategic use of landscaping delineates private from common amenity space.



②

Common amenity spaces

Outdoor common amenity areas should be accessible to all residents and should meet or exceed standards of universal design. Hardscape areas should be complemented by layered landscaped areas and canopy trees to make the space inviting and functional.

Programming of common amenity spaces should be shown on the landscape plan. Programming may include, but is not limited to, seating or dining areas, barbeque or kitchen spaces, play areas and opportunities for residents to garden, or a combination of programming elements. Site furnishings and lighting should be shown on the landscape plan.

Entrances and windows facing amenity spaces encourage use and foster social connection.



3

Private amenity spaces

Private amenity spaces, including those for below-grade units, extend the livable area of dwelling units and provide residents with opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. Private amenity spaces should be immediately adjacent to the unit they are provided for and should offer residents privacy through screening using a combination of architectural and landscape elements. Consideration should be given to providing access to sunlight, privacy and adequate space to ensure usability. Consider incorporating landscaped areas to enhance the quality of private amenity space.



Below-grade amenity spaces are set back from the public sidewalk and screened with planting to provide privacy while maintaining access to daylight and view above.





Trees and planting areas

1

Plant choices

Courtyard amenity areas provide access to outdoor space for residents, but many will be in full shade year-round. Plants should be chosen based on their ability to enhance these spaces and thrive in their specific site conditions. Shadow studies should be done to assess the growing conditions of these courtyard spaces. Landscaped areas and trees reduce the impacts of heat on urban areas and can buffer cold winds in the winter. The retention of existing healthy, mature trees and shrubs on site is encouraged.

Locate all plant material and trees in locations that allow for them to receive sufficient water and sunlight to ensure they can grow to their healthy, mature size. Planting directly under building overhangs or within 300mm of the building foundation is discouraged. Planting areas should be adequately sized and provide enough soil volume to support the mature spread of trees, shrubs and perennials which will enhance privacy for residents and neighbours. Plants should be grouped for visual impact, to emphasize pathways and entries, or to define amenity spaces while maintaining open space for passive or active use.

Many unique plants and plant communities thrive in Calgary. Provide a variety of plant material in the landscape, considering four-season interest, light conditions and habitat value for pollinators and birds. The use of native and drought tolerant, low-maintenance plants and trees is encouraged. Softscape alternatives to lawns are encouraged to reduce water and maintenance needs and expand site biodiversity. Landscaped areas should be mulched to suppress weeds and increase moisture retention. The use of gravel mulch is discouraged. More information on plant selection can be found here: [Plan your YardSmart yard and garden](https://www.calgary.ca/plan-your-yard-smart-yard-and-garden) (calgary.ca)

2

Stormwater management

Provide permeable areas to manage stormwater and snowmelt on site. Incorporating functional and visually pleasing stormwater management features such as rain gardens, vegetated bioswales and dry riverbeds within landscaped areas is encouraged. Plant material should be tolerant of both wet and dry conditions. More information on low impact development can be found here: [Low Impact Development](#) (calgary.ca)

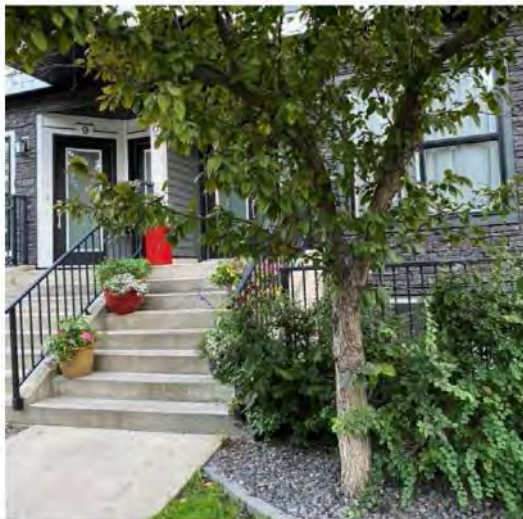


Stormwater management strategies can be a feature in landscape design.

3

Setback areas

Setback areas that face the sidewalk should be designed to improve the public realm by including canopy trees, both public and private, and layered landscaped areas that provide seasonal interest and reduce the visual impact of the building on the public realm. Softscape alternatives to lawns are encouraged in setback areas. Learn more about Calgary's public trees here: [City owned trees](#) (calgary.ca)



Garages and other accessory buildings should be complemented by landscaped areas that enhance the public realm.



A variety of plant colour, texture and scale provides four-season visual interest and softens the transition from public to private space.



4

Urban agriculture

Opportunities to grow and gather food and flowers can bring neighbours together and add an additional layer of ecological value to urban landscapes. Including native fruit-bearing trees and shrubs with edible fruit is encouraged. Provide opportunities for urban agriculture where there is sufficient access to sunlight throughout the growing season. Ensure high quality and sufficient growing medium and convenient water access is provided in gardening areas. Urban agriculture areas should meet or exceed standards of universal design.



Putting it all together

A comprehensive design process for small residential sites creates urban landscapes that promote well-being and contribute to healthy urban ecosystems. Residents can easily understand what amenity spaces are available to them, enjoy programming that is provided and are able to care for the outdoor spaces around their homes. Residents and visitors alike feel welcomed and safe, while outdoor spaces are animated and enhanced with architectural and landscape elements rich with dynamic plant and wildlife communities.



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