

# CHOOSING A LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL FOR YOUR RIVER-FRIENDLY GARDEN



# Why should you care about the practices of your landscape company?



*“River-Friendly” offers a holistic approach to landscaping that works with nature to reduce waste, prevent pollution and support the integrity of one of California’s key ecosystems, the Sacramento River watershed.*

**Our gardens** can be a haven for migratory birds, wildlife and our families or they can be a significant source of pollution and waste.

How a landscape professional manages your yard and garden – from using pesticides to choosing plants – has an impact on your garden, our natural resources and the Sacramento River watershed. Urban runoff carries pesticides, sediment, and fertilizer into stormdrains which lead to our creeks, waterways and eventually the Sacramento River.

Landscape professionals who use River-Friendly practices can eliminate or minimize these hazards. Building healthy soil by using compost and mulch is one such practice. Adding compost and mulch to the soil helps conserve water, reduces weeds and the need for pesticides – while also turning the soil into a living filter which removes pollutants from water. Using compost and mulch becomes the link between protecting our watersheds, conserving landfill space and cultivating living soil – the foundation of a healthy, thriving garden.

Nurturing healthy soil is just the beginning. River-Friendly landscapes mimic natural systems which recycle everything – water, debris, and

nutrients – endlessly. It pays attention to climate and local conditions and uses plants that are adapted to those conditions. It follows maintenance practices that support the goals of conserving resources and reducing waste.

## **This approach to gardening:**

- Landscapes locally
- Landscapes for less to the landfill
- Nurtures the soil
- Conserves water
- Conserves energy
- Protects water & air quality
- Creates & protects wildlife habitat



All River-Friendly gardens are not alike – a River-Friendly landscape can be your Mediterranean retreat, a shaded woodland or a wildlife habitat. It can include edible gardens, fruiting trees, beds of cutting flowers or play areas for your children. It does not limit you and your landscaper but offers a wide array of choices for creating and caring for your yard and garden. Selecting a River-Friendly landscape professional ensures you will have a beautiful garden that also protects our Sacramento area communities and environment.

# Asking the right questions

can help you find the right landscape professional to create or maintain your River-Friendly garden.

The following questions identify practices integral to River-Friendly landscaping.

## Landscaping Locally

### *Does the company...*



- Test the soil?

Knowing the soil's fertility, texture, and structure helps determine soil quality, types of plants it can best support and any need for supplements.

- Use local, natural plant communities as models?

A plant community is a relatively distinct pattern of vegetation found in different regions of the Central Valley. Using local plant communities as a model is a way to work with nature to create spectacular landscapes.

- Practice firescaping in high-risk fire areas?

Understanding the topography, fuel and local weather are critical to designing and maintaining a landscape that reduces the potential for loss to fire. Plant selection is also very important to reducing the fuel load and avoiding fire ladders.

## Landscaping for Less to the Landfill

### *Does the company...*



- Select appropriate plants?

Choosing the right plants for the right space is an important way to reduce the 200,000 tons of plant debris diverted annually in Sacramento County. Selecting plants that can grow to their mature size in the space allotted, replacing sheared hedges with natural shapes, and avoiding invasive species are sound practices.

- Grasscycle?

Grasscycling means leaving the clippings on the lawn after mowing so they decompose and release their nutrients into the soil.

- Compost plant debris? Or keep plant debris separated from trash for curbside pick-up?

Composting is the controlled decomposition of organic matter. It turns plant debris into a beneficial soil amendment.

- Prune selectively and properly?

Pruning should complement the natural form, and strengthen the structural integrity of, the plant. It should not be used to severely restrict plant growth — improper pruning weakens the plant and generates unnecessary waste.

# ASK



*Broken concrete is used to create a retaining wall.*

# CHOOSE

*Using compost  
conserves  
water and  
adds nutrients  
to your soil.*



## Nurturing the Soil

*Does the company...*



- Protect soil from erosion and compaction during construction?  
Conserving topsoil protects soil structure and the soil's ability to support the microbes that cycle nutrients and filter pollutants. Local waterways and aquatic habitat are also protected.
- Amend the soil with compost before planting?  
Compost fosters a diverse, fertile, and disease suppressive soil. It can improve structure, aeration and water holding capacity of the soil.
- Mulch regularly?  
Mulch conserves water, improves soil life, and enhances the growth of plants and the appearance of the landscape.
- Feed soils naturally?  
Using natural amendments, adding compost to the soil, or drenching the soil with compost tea, nurtures a strong soil foodweb. This makes nutrients available to the plants and protects water quality.

## Conserving Water

*Does the company...*



- Recommend California natives or Mediterranean plants?  
Appropriately sited native or Mediterranean plants are well adapted to California's summer-dry climate. Many species tolerate dry summers without much watering once they are established.
- Install and regularly maintain efficient irrigation systems?  
High efficiency systems limit evaporation and runoff. Well-maintained systems that do not leak, over-spray or gush water are critical to conserving water.
- Water according to need?  
Water needs vary by season and site. Appropriate watering rates moderate plant growth, which promotes plant health.



*Native and  
Mediterranean  
plants offer diverse  
and dynamic  
choices*

## Conserving Energy

### *Does the company...*



- Specify local products and suppliers?

Buying local reduces the hidden environmental costs, such as pollution and energy consumption of transporting materials.

- Protect trees that help moderate building temperatures?

Trees help conserve energy by shading, cooling the air through evapotranspiration, and providing wind breaks.

- Use hand-powered equipment while minimizing the use of gas-powered equipment?

Reducing fossil fuel consumption protects the health of the operator and local air and water quality.

## Protecting Water & Air Quality

### *Does the company...*



- Use an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach?

IPM is a holistic approach to insects, plant diseases, weeds, and other pests. First and foremost, IPM seeks to prevent pests by fostering a healthy, diverse landscape in which plants have the strength to resist disease and insect pests, and to out-compete weeds.

- Try alternative approaches before turning to pesticides?

Least toxic pesticides should be used as a last resort when preventative and non-chemical methods are not keeping pests below acceptable levels.

## Creating Wildlife Habitat

### *Does the company...*



- Consider habitat needs for birds and pollinators?

With thoughtful plant selection and design, home landscapes can provide food, water, shelter and nesting sites for birds, butterflies, beneficial insects and other creatures.

- Foster biodiversity?

A diverse landscape includes annuals, biennials and perennials of many different sizes, shapes, colors and textures. It includes evergreens and deciduous plants, species that bloom at different times of the year and those that bear fruit or berries. Diversity provides habitat for wildlife and beneficial organisms that help control plant pests.



*Protect kids and pets. Avoid using garden chemicals.*

# PROTECT

## Checking Credentials

Don't be afraid to ask a few questions to help glean more information:

1. Are they licensed and insured for the jobs they do?

Some licensing or certification programs include:

- Contractors State License Board
- Licensing and Certification Program, Department of Pesticide Regulation
- California Landscape Architects Technical Committee, California Architects Board
- International Society of Arboriculture Certification

2. Are they affiliated with any professional associations?

- American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)
- Association of Professional Landscape Designers (APLD)
- California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA)
- Ecological Landscape Association (ELA)
- Pesticide Applicators Professional Association (PAPA)
- American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA)
- Irrigation Association (IA)

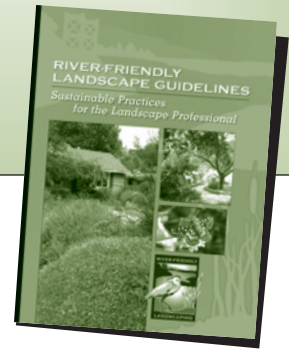
3. Can they provide references, especially for comparably scaled designs or sites?

A comprehensive and up-to-date list of local River-Friendly landscaping and gardening resources is available at:

**[www.sacramentostormwater.org/riverfriendly](http://www.sacramentostormwater.org/riverfriendly)**

## Dig Deeper Into Ecological Design and Maintenance

Your current or prospective landscape professional can learn more about these practices by requesting a copy of the *River-Friendly Landscape Guidelines: Sustainable Practices for the Landscape Professional*. Available FREE to landscape professionals in Sacramento County. Ordering instructions are at: [www.sacramentostormwater.org/riverfriendly](http://www.sacramentostormwater.org/riverfriendly) or (916) 874-8024.



This brochure for Sacramento County residents and the new *River-Friendly Landscape Guidelines* for landscape professionals were produced by the Sacramento Stormwater Quality Partnership in cooperation with StopWaste.Org. Both publications are modeled after the original Bay-Friendly landscape publications created by StopWaste.Org.



The goal of the **Sacramento Stormwater Quality Partnership (SSQP)** is to reduce pollution in local waterways. It educates and informs the public about urban runoff pollution and works with industries and businesses to encourage pollution prevention and reduce erosion. It is a partnership among Sacramento area public agencies, including the County of Sacramento and the Cities of Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Galt, Rancho Cordova, and Sacramento. More information on the Partnership is available at: [www.sacramentostormwater.org](http://www.sacramentostormwater.org).



The **Bay-Friendly Landscaping & Gardening** logo is a trademark of StopWaste.Org, a public agency providing the most environmentally sound waste management for the residents, businesses and institutions of Alameda County.