

Checklist for Hiring a Landscape Maintenance Contractor and Maintaining Certification

Taylor Morrison and National Wildlife Federation (NWF) have teamed up to restore and protect wildlife habitat in Taylor Morrison communities nationwide. Together we are engaging staff, residents and the public in accessible and effective wildlife habitat stewardship and conservation.

All National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitats® provide food, water, cover, and places to raise their young. They must be sustainability maintained to enhance biodiversity, reduce their ecological footprint, and lower costs. Taylor Morrison communities will have at least one of the following certified spaces which will be outlined in their Homeowners Association (HOA) management and maintenance plan:

- Certified Monarch Habitat/Pollinator Garden
- Certified Natural Open Space™
- Certified Nature Play Space™
- Other natural areas and sustainability features to be maintained

The landscape management company plays a critical role in supporting the health and biodiversity of Taylor Morrison communities, especially these certified areas, and will be your partner in sustainability.

Before services are contracted:

Each HOA has created an actionable landscape management and maintenance plan based on the certified areas and other sustainability features of the community's landscapes. Please share HOA landscape management and maintenance plan with potential contractors.

In general, any landscape maintenance contractor should be well-versed in:

- Non-chemical (organic) management practices
- Maintenance of perennial native plants
- Water conservation methods
- Exotic and invasive species control

It's important that the landscape maintenance contractors are selected based on their:

- Understanding of the habitat features in your community
- General knowledge of native plants and ecology
- Alignment with the specific conservation practices and sustainable products

Use the following checklist to guide your interviews with prospective contractors.

1. Native Plants - Trees, Shrubs, Grasses, and Herbaceous Perennials

Because of their value to wildlife, native plants are the foundation of Taylor Morrison certified habitats. Native plants are required for the Taylor Morrison community to maintain certification as a habitat. The landscape contractors must incorporate organic maintenance practices and should have a general knowledge of native plants and weeds in your region. Refer to the HOA habitat management plan to find specific maintenance practices for each habitat type.

If new plants are installed, the landscape maintenance company must select native plants from the *Native Plant List* (attached) and avoid plants on the *Do Not Plant* list (attached) to select species.

Provide the landscaping company with guidelines for mowing, snow removal, pavement-to-soil ratios, weeding, watering, mulching, and use of native plant species.

Discuss the following considerations with the landscape contractors when discussing each habitat type:

Woodlands: Because of their size, long life, and positive impact on their environment, trees cannot be easily replaced. Therefore, they should be located where they will thrive for the long-term.

- The landscaping contractors must be able to assess tree health and must employ safety procedures when caring for trees. Do they understand proper planting and pruning techniques to ensure that trees stay healthy?**

Meadow/Grasslands: If certain plants dominate these habitats over time, they must be thinned to allow other species to spread and to ensure a diverse plant community. If gaps form in the landscape, these areas can be planted or re-seeded with plants listed in the Native Plant List (attached). Refer to the habitat management plan for specific mowing practices.

- The native grasses and herbaceous perennials that make up meadows and grassland sites should not be cut back or mowed after blooming and should be managed for wildlife. Do the landscaping contractors understand meadow and grassland mowing practices?**

Wetlands (Forested Wetland, Swamp, Marsh, Emergent/Seasonal Wetland): Refer to local regulations for specific wetland management practices.

- Are the landscaping contractors familiar with local wetland management regulations?**

Monarch Pledge and Gardens: The majority of the plants in the monarch gardens are herbaceous perennials, including native milkweed species, and should not be cut back or removed after blooming. Leave dried seed heads on the plants during fall and winter. These plants will attract butterflies and host plants will have caterpillars on them. If new plants are added to these habitats, the contractors should refer to the *Native Plant List* and the *Do Not Plant* list (attached) to select native species that will thrive in these sites. Knowledge of seasonal annuals that provide color and nectar.

- Are the landscaping contractors familiar with native milkweed species?**

2. Soil Health

SOIL STRUCTURE (soil amendments, compaction, compost, fertilizers, soil testing): Leave the Leaves! Soil structure and organic makeup impact the amount of water retention, permeability, water infiltration, drainage, and aeration needed to make plants grow. A soil test and amendments should be added to all new our revised planting area to improve the soil's physical properties.

- Are the landscaping contractors trained to understand comprehensive soil management services including fertilizer applications (when/if needed), amendments, composting, soil testing, and leaf management?**

3. Safety Requirements and Codes

Although your landscaper has probably worked in your region, no two properties are alike. Outline the specific organizational safety practices that must be maintained at your site. Include community-wide standards for your property in your plans.

- Are the landscaping contractors familiar with federal, regional, and community safety compliance mandates?**

4. Irrigation Systems

If your certified habitats have irrigation systems, be sure to communicate with the landscaping management company about how to maintain them efficiently. Describe the current irrigation methods and how you plan to conserve water and reduce waste; outline the methods used to monitor leaks and water flows. Which parts of your water system are managed remotely? What is your plan for irrigation system inspection and maintenance?

- Are the landscaping contractors familiar with the following water-saving practices and systems?**

- **Rain shut-off devices**
- **Flow sensors**
- **Automatic irrigation systems**
- **Low-flow emitters like drip and soaker systems**
- **Evapotranspiration-based controllers**
- **Low-water-use or drought-tolerant plants**
- **The management and re-use of stormwater**
- **Water loss and application times (city, county and town restrictions)**
- **Irrigation heads and pipes that maybe be leaking**

5. Recycling and Composting

It is important for the landscaping management practices to create as little impact as possible. Discuss or make plans for the landscaping contractors to recycle or dispose of waste and debris in an environmentally-friendly manner. If your property already has recycling policies, make sure the landscapers incorporate these practices into their plans.

- Are the landscaping contractors familiar with composting systems or reusing materials (mulch, rocks, logs, etc.), if applicable?**

6. Establishment Period Special Needs

Newly-installed plants require extra watering, weeding, and mulching in order to develop strong root systems and become established in landscapes. Weed barriers should never be used in these habitats to ensure that plants can spread out over time. This establishment period can take anywhere from two to five years, but if it's done well, the payoff will last for decades. Discuss the specific needs of plants, drainage, and community use with the landscaping company. Refer to the HOA habitat management plan to find specific maintenance practices for each habitat type.

- Do the landscaping contractors understand the different management practices of newly-established landscapes?**

7. Pest, Disease, and Weed Management

The certified habitats should be regularly monitored for pests, diseases and weeds. Many weeds or invasive species have few or no natural enemies to keep their populations in balance with the rest of the local ecosystem and will compete with native species for sunlight, water, and nutrients. The landscapers must first be able to correctly identify plants as weeds or invasives and then determine the best way to remove and dispose of them. They should keep a log of control methods and results. Pull weeds as soon as you recognize

them. It is best to remove weeds when they are small and before they flower or set seed. After weeds or invasives are removed, it is important to replant these areas with native species as soon as possible.

There will inevitably be some damage from pests and weeds in organically managed landscapes, so set your tolerance thresholds and plan your recourse once those thresholds are exceeded.

Herbicides and pesticides will not be used in certified monarch habitats, hand-weeding may be required until the garden is well-established.

- Are the landscaping contractors familiar with pests, diseases, and weeds and management strategies?**

