

Maintenance of Your Stormwater Action Project

All gardens and tree plantings need maintenance. When done regularly, maintenance can be fun. It is a chance to be outside, to notice the changes in your plants, to see your first flowers blossom, and to watch the butterflies and birds that come to the garden.

When projects are not maintained, the plants and trees die, weeds take over, and your site loses the capacity to reduce stormwater.

We hope you will take pride in caring for your Stormwater Action Project, so that it will provide benefits to the environment and students for years to come. The following information and the maintenance chart (p. 3) describe the maintenance needed. It is important that involved teachers and students or student clubs ensure that such maintenance will be done.

Summer is an especially critical time for your plants and trees. We hope that students will take the lead in arranging summer volunteer schedules or reach out to the community and watershed organizations for assistance.

Watering is Essential – Spring through Fall

Plants

- *Hand water*, using a container or hose, around base of each plant for 1-2 minutes. Allow the water to soak into the ground, and take care not to wash away the mulch or soil.
- Here is a guideline for watering.
 - First 2 Weeks: water 3 times per week
 - Second 2 weeks: water 2 times per week
 - Next 6 weeks: water 1 time per week
 - When it rains one or more inches a week, watering may be unnecessary. Typically, watering is not needed from Nov. 30 – April 15, unless there is an extended warm dry spell in late winter or early spring.

Observe your plants regularly, especially in the first months after planting. If the soil is dry, water. If the plants are drooping, water! If the ground is soaking, don't water!

Trees

- Trees that have been in the ground less than 3 years require 25 gallons of water, or about 1.5 inches of rainfall, per week.
- Track rainfall totals from the weather reports or with a rain gauge. If less than 1.5 inches of rain falls in a week, it's time to water. Casey Tree Foundation will send your class a free rain gauge, if you take the [25 to Stay Alive Pledge](#) on their website.

Mulching – Spring and Fall

Mulching is when we put a layer of shredded bark around plants and trees. Mulch acts like the fallen leaves in a forest: it reduces weed growth, keeps the moisture in soil from evaporating, regulates soil temperature, and adds organic matter to the soil.

The mulch in your garden will decompose over time (enriching your soil as it does). This means that new mulch needs to be added. *At the beginning of the school year and at the end of winter make sure that:*

- Your site has a minimum of 3 inches of mulch.
- That the surface of the mulch hasn't hardened. If this has occurred, rake away the old mulch and apply a fresh layer.

Mulch Dos and Don'ts

- Mulch should be placed in a donut shape around trees *at least 3 inches away from tree trunks or shrubs.*
- Use natural mulch with no dye.
- Shredded hardwood mulch is preferred, but composted wood chips, or grass clippings can be used.
- Adding compost under the mulch will benefit your soil and plants.

Mulch slows down weeds, but it doesn't stop all of them.

Get the best of weeds, by pulling them regularly, and making sure you get their roots.

Weeding – Spring, Summer, and Fall

Smaller weeds are easier to pull than big ones, so don't let them grow! Many weeds and invasive plants reproduce from their roots (rhizomes), as well as seeds. Therefore, it is important to dig out the roots (with a hoe, hand trowel, or other tool) and to remove weeds before they produce seeds. At the minimum, weed every 2 to 3 weeks.

Other Fall or Spring Maintenance

Spreading Plants: The magic of gardens is that perennials will spread. Every 3 to 5 years, fast growing flowers, such as Obedient Plant, may need to be divided, or reduced in size by removing some of the plants with their roots. Signs of overcrowding include reduced flowering and weak, spindly stems. Extra plants represent opportunities for sharing, garden expansion, or a new garden!

Fertilizer: Because your site has been planted with appropriate native plants and is mulched regularly, fertilizer is not needed.

Dead stems and seed heads: Leaving stems and seeds in gardens throughout the winter provides food and shelter for birds and wildlife. In the late winter or early spring, old stems can be cut to about 3- 4 inches and dried grasses to about 6 inches. Old leaf litter and stems can replenish your compost pile.

Tree and Shrub Pruning: Pruning can be done to shape shrubs or a trees. It is unlikely that pruning will be needed in the first few years. Minor pruning will not adversely affect trees and shrubs at any time of the year. Major pruning should be done in late winter to early spring.

A handy maintenance schedule is on the following page. Your class should make its own schedule and assign people to specific jobs. If you need more volunteers, consider advertising your project to get student or parent volunteers.

Chart for Planning Maintenance of Conservation Landscapes & Bay-Wise Gardens												
Task	Month											
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Monitoring ¹												
Apply mulch ²												
Cut back perennials and grasses ³												
Watering ⁴												
Weeding as needed ⁵												
Replace, thin, and add plants as needed ⁶												
Snow management ⁷												

(Adapted from the District of the Department of the Environment Rain Garden and BayScape Maintenance Schedule)

1. Check for weeds and depth of mulch. Remove trash or other debris from garden.
2. Apply shredded cedar or hardwood mulch in April and November to maintain a depth of 3 inches.
3. Cut back perennials (not shrubs or trees) to about 4 inches.
4. Water to an equivalent of 1" per week until established. Once established (about a year), water from May to October when there has been no rain for 10 days or more.
5. Clean up winter weeds in late February/early March and then weed every two to four weeks, as necessary, from April to November.
6. Replace dead plants and thin plants if needed from June to October. The optimum times for adding or moving plants are April through May and September through October.
7. Avoid placing snow on top or in close proximity to garden. Limit deicing salt within close proximity of garden.