

TOWN OF BARNSTABLE

POLICY ON ECOLOGICALLY BENEFICIAL LANDSCAPING ON TOWN-OWNED LANDS

Purpose

The Town of Barnstable ("Town") recognizes its responsibility to serve as a steward of public lands and natural resources and to lead by example in implementing environmentally responsible land management practices. The purpose of this policy is to establish science-based standards for the management, maintenance, renovation, and development of Town-owned landscapes that protect air and water quality, conserve natural resources, promote biodiversity, and enhance community resilience.

Findings

The Town Council finds that:

1. The Town has already demonstrated leadership in ecological stewardship by incorporating native plantings in municipal landscapes, planting native trees in Hyannis¹, obtaining Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary designation for the Olde Barnstable Fairgrounds Golf Course², pursuing similar certification³ for the Hyannis Golf Course, and participating in the National Wildlife Federation's Mayor's Monarch Pledge⁴.
2. Landscaping practices that conserve water, prioritize native plants⁵, protect soil health, reduce air and noise pollution, and eliminate unnecessary synthetic inputs will improve ecosystem resilience, protect water quality, and support employee and public health.
3. Native plants are adapted to local climate and soil conditions, generally require less irrigation and maintenance, reduce long-term management costs⁶, improve stormwater infiltration, mitigate urban heat impacts, and provide essential habitat for native wildlife⁷, including pollinators and migratory birds.
4. Native trees are a key element in our landscape protecting us from the impacts of climate change by absorbing large amounts of stormwater, filtering pollutants from the air, cooling the air through shade, buffering wind and noise and precipitation, preventing erosion, and enhancing wildlife habitat.
5. Synthetic fertilizers and pesticides (including rodenticides⁸) contribute to nutrient pollution and contamination of Cape Cod's sole-source aquifer and the Town's ponds, estuaries, and embayments and may adversely affect human health and wildlife⁹.
6. Science-based guidance from organizations including the Massachusetts Native Plant Trust¹⁰, the Association to Preserve Cape Cod¹¹, Barnstable Clean Water Coalition¹², and the Northeast Organic Farming Association¹³ supports the use of native plants and organic land care practices.
- 7.
8. Scientific research documents significant declines in biodiversity¹⁴, including insect¹⁵ and bird populations¹⁶, increasing impacts from climate change, and continuing degradation of water quality¹⁷.
9. Ecologically beneficial landscaping practices are consistent with the Commonwealth's biodiversity conservation objectives and Executive Order No. 618, Biodiversity in Massachusetts.¹⁸

Policy Statement

The Town of Barnstable shall implement ecologically beneficial landscaping practices in the management, maintenance, renovation, and development of all Town-owned lands, including school properties and newly acquired lands.

At a minimum, Town land management practices shall:

- A. Protect water quality and soil health, and promote water conservation in all landscaping activities;
- B. Prioritize the use of plant species native to Massachusetts in municipal landscaping projects, with a goal that more than ninety percent (90%) of plantings consist of native species,¹⁹ except where site conditions, public safety considerations, historic preservation requirements, or specific operational needs warrant otherwise;
- C. Reduce mowing frequency, and where practicable eliminate non-native turf grass in favor of native grasses, sedges, groundcovers, meadows, and pollinator-supporting plant communities;
- D. In suitable areas, leave plant stalks, seed heads and fallen leaves to enhance wildlife habitat, provide soil nourishment and food for birds and other wildlife, and protection for overwintering pollinators²⁰;
- E. Eliminate the routine use of fertilizers after initial planting.²¹
- F. Prohibit the use of synthetic pesticides, including insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and rodenticides, except when their use is determined by the Town Manager or designee to be necessary to protect public health, public safety, critical infrastructure, or to control invasive species where no reasonable alternative exists;
- G. Preservation of native trees especially mature trees will be prioritized in the landscape. Native tree planting programs will be establishment or expanded into all areas of the Town of Barnstable. Trees and their critical root zones will be protected during property redevelopment and construction. Trees needing to be removed especially along road easements will be replaced at a 2:1 dbh.
- H. Adhere to applicable federal, state, and local restrictions and best management practices governing vegetation management activities, including the timing of tree and shrub cutting, pruning, and trimming to protect nesting and breeding wildlife²² (such as avoiding April 1-June 30 for most nesting birds);
- I. Avoid the installation of plants treated with systemic insecticides and avoid the purchase or use of seed coated with neonicotinoids or similar systemic insecticides;

- J. Prioritize switching to electric powered landscaping equipment when procuring new or replacement machinery and encourage contractors to do the same. This will reduce air and noise pollution, thereby enhancing employee and public health.

Implementation

The Town Manager shall designate a project lead to coordinate implementation of this policy across all Town departments and divisions, including the School Department as appropriate.

Departments shall incorporate the principles of this policy into planning, design, procurement, maintenance, and capital improvement projects involving Town-owned landscapes.

The Town shall encourage staff training and collaboration with scientific, conservation, and community organizations to support implementation of this policy and to identify best practices and funding opportunities.

Annual Reporting

The Town Manager or designee shall provide an annual written report to the Town Council summarizing:

1. Actions undertaken by Town staff and contractors to implement this policy;
2. Progress toward increasing the use of native plant species and reducing non-native turf areas;
3. Measures taken to reduce synthetic fertilizer and pesticide use;
4. Seasonal adjustments to vegetation cutting and trimming to reduce wildlife impacts;
5. Ecologically beneficial landscaping projects completed during the reporting period;
6. Progress towards converting to electric equipment; and
7. Recommendations for improved understanding and implementation of this policy.

Effective Date

This policy shall become effective immediately upon adoption by a majority vote of the Barnstable Town Council and shall apply to all Town departments and to all Town-owned lands, including school properties, newly acquired lands, and projects involving the maintenance, renovation, or development of municipal properties.

References:

¹ Greening Hyannis: <https://greeninghyannis.com/>

² October 1, 2025 local news: <https://www.wickedlocal.com/story/news/local/2025/10/01/olde-barnstable-fairgrounds-earns-audubon-sanctuary-status/86422561007/>

³ Audubon International's certification criteria: <https://www.auduboninternational.org/acsp-for-golf/>

⁴ National Wildlife Federation Mayor's Monarch Pledge: [https://barnstable.gov/Departments/Conservation/Special Instructions/Mayors-Monarch-Pledge-.pdf?tm=2/20/2026%204:03:21%20PM](https://barnstable.gov/Departments/Conservation/Special%20Instructions/Mayors-Monarch-Pledge-.pdf?tm=2/20/2026%204:03:21%20PM)

⁵ Plants Native to Cape Cod and Massachusetts.

A. Cape Cod Commission 2025 Native Plant List: <https://www.capecodcommission.org/our-work/cape-cod-native-plant-list/>

B. Association to Preserve Cape Cod: <https://capecodnativeplants.org/find-plants/>

C. Native Plant Trust: <https://www.nativeplanttrust.org/for-your-garden/buy-native-plants-new/>

D. UMass: <https://www.umass.edu/agriculture-food-environment/landscape/fact-sheets/north-american-plants-for-new-england-gardens>

E. Pollinator Pathway: <https://www.pollinator-pathway.org/plant-list>

⁶ Native Landscaping the cost-effective choice over turf grass:

<https://www.prairieinprogress.com/blog/green-savings-the-cost-effective-choice-of-native-landscaping-over-turf-grass#:~:text=Over%20a%20decade%2C%20you%20could,per%20acre%20over%20two%20decades!>

<https://www.ernstseed.com/cost-effective-native-vegetation/#:~:text=Saving%20money%20by%20using%20less,by%20reducing%20their%20mowing%20frequency.>

A Source Book on Natural Landscaping for Public Officials. Reduced costs of landscape installation and maintenance:

<https://archive.epa.gov/greenacres/web/html/chap2.html#:~:text=Cost%20data%20show%20that%20conventional,as%20summer%20heat%20and%20drought>

⁷ Benefits of Native Plants in Managed Landscapes:

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/Native Plant Materials/Native Gardening/](https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/Native_Plant_Materials/Native_Gardening/)

⁸ Rodenticide impact on wildlife: <https://www.massaudubon.org/take-action/advocate/poison-free-pest-control>

⁹ Pesticide impacts on human health: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11016626/>

¹⁰ Massachusetts Native Plant Trust, established in 1900: www.nativeplanttrust.org

¹¹ Association to Preserve Cape Cod: <https://apcc.org/>

¹² Barnstable Clean Water Coalition: <https://bcleanwater.org/>

¹³ Northeast Organic Farmers Association: <https://nofa.org>

¹⁴ Biodiversity Crisis: Pedro Jaureguiberry, et.al. (2022) "*The direct drivers of recent global anthropogenic biodiversity loss.*" Science Advances vol.8. issue 45, DOI: [10.1126/sciadv.abm9982](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abm9982) originally published online November 9, 2022.

¹⁵ Significant Insect Decline:

Dave Goulson, (2019) “*The insect apocalypse, and why it matters.*” Current Biology, Volume 29, Issue 19, 2019, Pages R967-R971, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2019.06.069>.

Julie Janicki, (2022) “*The collapse of insects.*” Reuters December 6, 2022, [https://www.reuters.com/graphics/GLOBAL- ENVIRONMENT/INSECT-APOCALYPSE/egpbykdxjvq/](https://www.reuters.com/graphics/GLOBAL-ENVIRONMENT/INSECT-APOCALYPSE/egpbykdxjvq/)

¹⁶ Significant Bird Decline: Kenneth V. Rosenberg, et.al. (2019) “*Decline of the North American avifauna.*” Science 366 (6461), 120-124. DOI: 10.1126/science.aaw1313 originally published online September 19, 2019. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw1313>

¹⁷ State of the Waters: Cape Cod 2025, A Project of the Association to Preserve Cape Cod <https://capecodwaters.org/>

¹⁸ Massachusetts Executive Order No. 618: Biodiversity in Massachusetts. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-biodiversity-goals-report-2025/download>

¹⁹ Cape Cod Commission 2025 Technical Bulletin: Wildlife and Plant Habitat: <https://resources.capecodcommission.org/resource-library/782e7c9460ce/wildlife-plant-habitat-technical-bulletin-2025/>

²⁰ Xerces Society: “Leave The Leaves”: <https://xerces.org/leave-the-leaves>

Leaving the Leaves and Flower Stalks for Wildlife:

<https://extension.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/2025-02/leaving-leaves-and-flower-stalks-for-wildlife-fact-sheet-2025.pdf>

²¹ Cape Cod native plants thrive in our non-fertilized naturally occurring soils. Supplemental use of fertilizer is not needed after initial planting when an organic compost could be added. Town-owned golf courses should follow the Audubon International’s certification criteria: <https://www.auduboninternational.org/acsp-for-golf/>

²² Seasonal Restrictions and Best Practices for vegetation management should be consistent with regulations for endangered and other species as noted in federal regulations (<https://www.epa.gov/nepa>), State endangered species act regulations (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/ma-endangered-species-act-mesa-overview0>), and the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and endangered species program (<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/masswildlifes-natural-heritage-endangered-species-program>).