



Gardening for Wildlife in an HOA Community

sepa@wildones.org



What's a Planned Community?

Pennsylvania Planned Communities Act, 1997

- More than 12 units
- Homeowner's Association in charge of operation and governance
- Residents of community are elected or appointed to the HOA board of directors

Can include condominiums, 55+ communities, and single-family neighborhoods



Why a Planned Community?

- To manage services the municipality doesn't or won't provide
 - Private roads
 - Sanitary sewer
 - Trash collection
 - Maintenance of common areas
- Monthly or annual fees for these services are charged to residents





*Southeastern
Pennsylvania*

sepa@wildones.org

What Else Can a Planned Community Do?

- Maintain exterior of buildings
- Regulate types of vehicles parked outside homes
- Regulate structures that can be built outside – patios, decks, trellises
- Limit seasonal decorations
- **Control landscaping**





Southeastern
Pennsylvania

sepa@wildones.org

Moving Day





sepa@wildones.org

Dealing with HOA Landscaping Requirements

1. Get a copy of the regulations from your HOA.
2. READ THEM CAREFULLY.
3. Contracts are interpreted according to the words that are used, not the HOA's interpretation of the words.
 - Don't assume what's not written.
 - Terms that aren't defined in the document are given their common meaning.

"A lawn is an area of soil-covered land planted with grasses and other durable plants such as clover which are maintained at a short height with a lawn mower (or sometimes grazing animals) and used for aesthetic and recreational purposes—it is also commonly referred to as part of a garden."



*Southeastern
Pennsylvania*

sepa@wildones.org

Options for Required Turf Lawn

Expand permitted beds (for example, foundation plantings) into the lawn.

Plant a sedge lawn instead of turf grass and keep it mowed if required.





Southeastern
Pennsylvania

sepa@wildones.org

Options for Height Restriction Not Requiring Turf Grass



Native groundcover plants

Wild ginger

Pussytoes

Three-leaved cinquefoil

Heuchera

Wild violet

Sedges

Prostrate heath aster

Foamflower

Self-heal

Allegheny spurge

Moss phlox

Creeping phlox

Golden ragwort

Virginia creeper

Woodland stonecrop



Southeastern
Pennsylvania

sepa@wildones.org

Options for Less Restrictive Height Limitations

- If the rules specify plants shorter than a certain height (e.g., 12" or 18"), select natives that will reliably stay below the required height.

- Taller perennials and shrubs can be kept short using the [Chelsea chop](#) (cutting perennials back by 1/3 before June 1) or consistent pruning (shrubs).
- Native vines can be allowed to run along the ground or trained on a short, horizontal frame instead of a vertical one.





Southeastern
Pennsylvania

sepa@wildones.org

Change the System

If the rules are too restrictive, volunteer to join the HOA's landscape committee, or run for election to the HOA board, and work with other members to revise the restrictions.

Ecological reasons for change

- Turf grass provides very little ecological benefit.
- Native plants feed native wildlife. Who doesn't want more birds and butterflies?
- Native plants help control erosion and improve water quality and infiltration.

Economic reasons for change

- Turf grass requires a lot of water (\$), chemical fertilizer (\$), and constant mowing (\$). Native plants don't need any of that to look good and benefit wildlife.



Maryland and Maine Lead the Way

[Maryland House Bill 322, 2021](#). Real Property – Restrictions on Use – Low-Impact Landscaping

No deed, contract, or rules of a condominium or homeowners association may impose unreasonable limitations on low-impact landscaping, including habitat gardens to attract wildlife, rain gardens, and xeriscaping.

[Maine LD 649, 2023](#). An Act To Promote Water Conservation and Water Quality and Create Habitat for Wildlife, Including Pollinator Species, by Protecting Low-Impact Landscaping

The law prohibits restrictions on landscaping techniques that conserve water and create habitat for wildlife, including a requirement to use turf grass.



Southeastern
Pennsylvania

sepa@wildones.org

Resources

[Carex for the Mid-Atlantic Region](#)

[Cornell's Take on the Native Lawn](#)

[Naturalized Basins in Montgomery Township](#)

[Basin Retrofits – Pennsylvania Environmental Council](#)

[Rethinking Basins: Putting Nature to Work](#)

[Butterflies: 1, Bullies: 0](#)

[Guide to Passing Wildlife-Friendly Property Maintenance Ordinances](#)

[Community Association Spotlights \(Virginia\)](#)

[Habitat-Friendly Landscaping for Homeowners and Condo Associations \(Virginia\)](#)

