

## Trees, Turf & Shrubs

Grounds maintenance is an essential responsibility for community associations. While other common areas—such as sidewalks, drains, roads and painted surfaces—deteriorate and depreciate in value over time, well-kept turf, trees and shrubs appreciate in value. Thus, a carefully developed and executed landscaping maintenance program helps protect property values.

Except in very small associations, the services of professional landscapers will likely be needed—to one extent or another—for a board to fulfill its responsibility to protect the association's landscaping asset. Boards must appreciate the nature of their responsibility, be sure to make informed decisions and organize and operate their grounds maintenance programs effectively.

The board sets standards for grounds maintenance and is responsible for seeing that those standards are met. Grounds maintenance committees, professional managers and landscaping professionals provide valuable support to boards to maintain aesthetic standards.

Boards must determine and prioritize the association's grounds maintenance needs, establish a formal landscaping maintenance program and specify what will be done and who will do it. Deciding whether to hire a contractor depends on the size and geography of the community and what resources the association has to do the work. Boards or a designated grounds maintenance committee can delegate maintenance tasks to association staff or independent contractors.

Many factors—including climate, soil conditions, health of the plant and amount of use—determine what type and how much maintenance each type of planting needs. Selecting the correct grass species for your area, mowing turf at the

correct height, treating poor soil, fertilizing judiciously and watering appropriately ensures quality turf and minimizes weed and insect invasions.

Weeds can be controlled by natural or chemical methods. Chemical methods are quick and efficient, but can be harmful to the environment. Natural methods take time to show results and require more work, but are more eco-friendly. Local authorities, including the state university, local Cooperative Extension Services and the Internet are excellent sources of information about all aspects of landscaping and grounds maintenance.

Pruning is needed to direct growth in immature trees; remove dead wood, unsightly and broken branches and disease; and to increase air circulation and light exposure. The best time for pruning depends largely on the type of tree. Trees need nitrogen for growth and green foliage, phosphorous for root development and potassium for strong stems and leaf growth.

Healthy trees and shrubs are assets to any community. Keeping them healthy, attractive, disease free and safe requires significant effort from association staff and tree-care professions. Hiring a professional arborist or tree-care company is a good way to protect this asset, and finding one who is qualified is an important responsibility.

Healthy turf, trees and shrubs can do much to enhance the property values of all owners and give them a strong sense of pride in their community. If boards understand the needs of and dangers to association turf, trees and shrubs, they can fulfill their fiduciary duty to protect assets by maintaining the health of community landscaping for many years, supporting community growth and enhancing the beauty of the community as well as quality of life for association residents.