



GARDENING IN PLANTING STRIPS

Last Revised 12/5/17

Planting strips are the unpaved area between the sidewalk and street. They may be planted with low-growing perennials, ornamental grasses, shrubs, herbs, or edible plants. Gardens in planting strips can beautify your neighborhood, increase the curb appeal of your home, attract pollinators to your garden, or provide extra space for growing vegetables. They also create a safe and welcoming place for people to walk.

A permit is not required to install vegetation in a planting strip. However, a free Street Use permit is required to install trees and raised beds. This Client Assistance Memo (CAM) addresses siting criteria, design guidance, and the permitting process for gardens in planting strips.

DESIGN

Location

Before you design a garden in your planting strip, be sure to verify that:

- The project does not conflict with underground utilities or large tree roots. Call [811](tel:811) to request the location of all nearby underground utilities.

Design

Your planting strip garden design should follow these guidelines:

Planting

- Plants should have a maximum mature height of 3 feet
- Plants within 30 feet of an intersection should have a maximum mature height of 30 inches

- Plants within 10 feet of a driveway should have a maximum mature height of 30 inches (see [CAM 2204](#))
- Under trees, plants should not be installed within 4 feet of the trunk
- If there is a parking lane next to the planting strip, there should be an 18" wide landing strip that is flush with the curb. It may be planted with low-growing groundcover or turf, a mulched surface, or set with pavers, bricks, or stepping stones.

Raised Beds and Fixed Objects

- Fixed objects, including raised beds, should be set back at least 1 foot from the sidewalk edge, 3 feet from the curb face, and 5 feet from utility poles, fire hydrants, and other utility structures
- Planting strips must be at least 6 feet wide to install raised beds
- Maximum height of raised beds is 18 inches
- Maximum length of raised beds is 40 feet
- Allow 3 feet between raised beds for pedestrian access between the street and sidewalk
- On streets without a sidewalk or curb, raised beds should be set back 11 feet from the edge of pavement
- Raised beds should not be made with creosote-treated timber, which is toxic. Other types of treated lumber are not recommended.

For additional guidance on designing and installing your planting strip garden, refer to the resource list at the end of this CAM.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER: This Client Assistance Memo (CAM) should not be used as a substitute for codes and regulations. The applicant is responsible for compliance with all code and rule requirements, whether or not described in this CAM.

VEGETATION

Street Trees

Trees growing in the right of way are protected by [Seattle Municipal Code 15.43](#). Existing street trees may be compatible with planting strip gardens, but care must be taken to avoid injuring any street tree. Changes in soil type, grade, and/or water infiltration can cause short- and long-term health problems for trees. If there are street trees in the planting strip where you wish to install a garden, please note them on your site plan.

We encourage you to plant new street trees in your planting strip. Please note that certain trees, such as fruiting cherry, apple, and pear, are prohibited since they can pose a safety risk to pedestrians when fruit falls on the walkway. Detailed guidance on planting and maintaining street trees is available in SDOT's [Street Tree Manual](#).

Plant Selection

We recommend including native and drought-tolerant vegetation in your plant palette. For plant recommendations, refer to the [Seattle Green Factor Plant List](#). Remember that planting strips are shared public spaces, so it's important to choose plants that will not obstruct the sidewalk or reduce visibility at intersections and driveways.

APPLICATION PROCESS

To apply for a Street Use permit, please submit the following materials online or at the Street Use Permit Services Counter:

- A completed [Street Use Construction Permit Application Form](#)
- A [Right of Way Impact Site Plan](#). Detailed guidance on preparing a site plan is available in [CAM 2116](#). On your site plan:
 - Draw the length and width of the proposed garden in the planting strip
- A list of plants potentially being used
- An [Urban Forestry Application](#) if you propose to prune, remove, or add new street trees

INSTALLATION

If you need to use any parking spaces during installation to stage equipment or materials, you'll need to place [Temporary "No Parking" Signs](#) in those spaces 72 hours before you need to use them (see [CAM 2114](#)).

If there is an established tree in the planting strip, protection fencing should be placed in a minimum 4-foot diameter area around the trunk. Construction materials and equipment should not be placed in this area. See the [Street Tree Manual](#) to learn more about how to protect existing street trees.

Planting in spring (mid-March to June) or fall (late September to October) is recommended to take advantage of natural rainfall. You will need to water adequately to establish the plants. Apply a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch to help suppress weeds and conserve soil moisture. See the Seattle Public Utilities [Lawn & Garden Guides](#) for information about installing plants.

MAINTENANCE

[Seattle Municipal Code 10.52.030](#) requires the adjacent property owner to maintain the vegetation in the planting strip adjacent to their property. Like any landscape feature, your planting strip garden will need tending. Plants will need watering for two to three summers until their root systems are established. Weeding, mulching, and replacing diseased or dead plants should be done in the spring and fall. For more gardening tips, refer to Seattle Public Utilities' [Lawn & Garden Guides](#).

RELATED LINKS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Call Before You Dig:

<http://call811.com/>

The Garden Hotline:

(206) 633-0224 or email help@gardenhotline.org

Great Plant Picks

www.greatplantpicks.org/

Growing Food in Planting Strips:

www.seattle.gov/util/EnvironmentConservation/MyLawnGarden/FoodGardening/PlantingStrips/index.htm

Hellstrip Gardening: Create a Paradise between the Sidewalk and the Curb

www.evelynhadden.com/HELLSTRIPbook.html

Planting Strip Paving and Tree Planting Rules

[CAM 2304]:

www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDOT/CAMs/cam2304.pdf

Right of Way Impact Site Plan Templates:

www.seattle.gov/transportation/permits-and-services/permits/permit-templates-and-checklists

SDOT Street Use Applications, Forms & Templates:

www.seattle.gov/transportation/permits-and-services/permits/permit-templates-and-checklists

Seattle Green Factor Plant List:

www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDOT/PublicSpaceManagement/SeattleGreenFactorPlantList.pdf

Seattle Municipal Code (SMC):

10.52.030, 15.43

Seattle Public Utilities Lawn & Garden Guides:

www.seattle.gov/util/EnvironmentConservation/MyLawnGarden/index.htm

Temporary No Parking Zone Information:

www.seattle.gov/transportation/permits-and-services/permits/parking-permits/temporary-no-parking-permits

SDOT Street Tree Manual:

www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDOT/About/DocumentLibrary/StreetTreeManualWEB.pdf

UW Botanic Gardens Elisabeth C. Miller Library Plant

Answer Line:

<http://depts.washington.edu/hortlib/collections/pal.shtml>

Access to Information

Client Assistance Memos are available online at:

www.seattle.gov/transportation/document-library/client-assistance-memos. Paper copies of these documents are available at our Permit Services Counter located on the 23rd floor of the Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 5th Avenue in downtown Seattle; phone number (206) 684-5253.