



# Natural Resource Bulletin

## Frequently Asked Questions:

*Question: Will the tall grass increase fire danger around my home?*

Compared to heavier fuels such as brush and trees, grasses (particularly native grasses) are considered a light wildfire fuel. The most important space to maintain for maximum fire protection for your home is not the open space behind it, but rather the 15 foot area **directly adjacent** to the edge of your home.

*Question: What are the best ways to create defensible space directly adjacent to the edge of my home?*

1. Properly thin and prune trees and shrubs, which can act as ladder fuel.
2. Clear roof and gutters of debris.
3. Remove any branches overhanging the roof and chimney.
4. Secure your chimney screen and make sure it is in good condition.
5. Ensure outdoor spigots have a hose and nozzle and can reach all parts of the house.
6. Ensure your driveway provides necessary clearance for fire and emergency equipment.

For more information on defensible space, visit: [csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/0632.pdf](http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/0632.pdf)

*Question: Will the tall grass increase my chances of a negative encounter with wildlife?*

Creating suitable habitat for wildlife in open space and natural areas helps keep wildlife from looking to your yard for food and cover.

*Question: Isn't the tall grass and native vegetation in violation of city code?*

Open space and natural areas have profoundly different management goals than irrigated turf areas. Maximum height limitations do not apply for the management of Natural Areas. Sec 142-76. Natural Areas

## "No Mow" Native Grass Conservation Areas

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The closely trimmed, frequently watered, carefully fertilized and nearly always green landscapes we've all grown accustomed to are changing in some of our urban parks and open spaces. For many reasons, this is a healthy change. Native grasses and wilder landscapes can build healthier parks, open spaces, golf courses, and communities.

Traditional turf park landscapes can be costly and time consuming to maintain. Incorporating native grasses and wilder landscapes into public parks, open spaces and golf courses has many benefits that go beyond budgetary, here are just a few:

**Water conservation:** In Aurora, traditional turf may require up to 30 inches of supplemental water per season. Once established, native landscapes often require little or no supplemental water. With clean, safe and sustainable water becoming increasingly expensive and scarce in the west, water conservation is an essential goal for all resource managers.

**Cleaner air:** Maintaining traditional turf areas generates CO<sub>2</sub>, dust, ozone and particulate matter; all contributors to air pollution. Native grasses and landscapes effectively store CO<sub>2</sub>, not just in the grass but also in extensive below ground root systems.

**Better water quality:** Letting the grass grow, particularly in urban drainage areas, helps reduce erosion and helps improve stormwater filtration. Native landscapes require little or no chemical fertilizers. Common chemical fertilizers such as Phosphate and Nitrogen encourage unsightly and unhealthy algae blooms, something we all agree is a nuisance.

**Safer and healthier homes for wildlife:** Frequent mowing, chemicals, lack of diversity, and lack of cover make traditional turf landscapes an uninviting place for most wildlife. Native grasses and shrubs provide cover, shade, resting and nesting habitat for many beneficial species such as insect eating birds and busy pollinators. Providing healthy habitats in parks and open spaces helps reduce ugly conflicts that can occur when wildlife turns to backyards for food and cover. Irrigated turf areas can attract nuisance levels of species such as Canada geese. Canada geese prefer feeding on soft, sweet and easy non-native turf. Planting with natives discourages large flocks of grazing geese.

**Fewer weeds:** Because they use less water, less fertilizer and have fewer disturbances over time, native landscapes are less welcoming to invasion by noxious weeds. Noxious weeds such as puncturevine, Scotch thistle, and knapweed are always looking for a free ride on a mower to a freshly disturbed site where they can take hold and take over.

*If you would like to learn more about your local native grasses and landscapes, please contact Aurora Naturalist staff at 303-739-2428 or visit [www.auroragov.org/nature](http://www.auroragov.org/nature).*

