

## **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY VOLUNTEER CHECKLIST**

1. **The goal of landscape installation** is to ensure that the house receives its Certificate of Occupancy (CO). The proper placement and installation of trees, the rain garden, sod, grass seed, mulch, and plants all contribute to this goal.
2. The CFMG coordinator sends out a list of all the houses and those CFMGers who have volunteered for each one. The list contains the phone number of the AHH house leader.
3. A CFMG team consists of 2 but preferably 3 CFMG volunteers. Each team should have one person who has volunteered before to help guide the others. It is recommended that a CFMGer should have worked on at least three houses before becoming a “lead.”
4. The CFMG team leader will be the **contact person** with the Atlanta Habitat House Leader (AHHL) and will coordinate with the other CFMG volunteer(s). The CFMG leader should send a message to the other team members at least one week before the work date to remind them of the work day. Some AHHLs like to be fully in charge; others are happy to let us do our thing independently.
5. AHH has prepared a plant list to accompany the various configurations of the AHH houses. However, we will not know which plants will be selected for each house until the Thursday (or two days) before the work day. Frank A. Smith Nursery supplies the plants for AHH. It is up to the CFMGers to arrange the placement of plants on site.
6. AHH is now supplying up to 10 **bags of Nature’s Helper** for each house. Most of the Nature’s Helper should be used to enrich the soil for the plants and shrubs. Use the remainder for the rain garden.
7. AHH will supply both pine straw and wood chips for mulch. Use the wood chips in the rain garden. Use the pine straw for the plants, the tree(s), around the perimeter of the structure (in line with the house’s soffit), and other areas not covered by plants or grass. If you believe that the amount of mulch delivered on the work day will not be sufficient for the house, tell your AHHL early so he/she can order more.
8. Place folded-in-half lengthwise landscape fabric along the front brickwork of the house to prevent splashing of dirt. Do this before you have installed the plants.

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9. Work starts at 7:30 AM on the landscaping day (however, check with the AHHL to determine if a different starting time has been fixed). Be sure to **arrive by 7:30 AM** or earlier to get organized before everyone arrives. You are required to submit a release form and a vaccination form annually (sent out at the beginning of the year to all CFMGers and to be returned to AHH). Place a piece of duct tape with your name on it on both the front and back of your shirt or jacket. **Make sure the homeowner works with you planting and laying the sod (to get her/him invested in the landscape).**
10. Shovels, pick axes, utility knives, and rakes are provided--some AHHLs supply a machete to cut the sod. Make it a priority that you remind the AHHL to bring at least four pick axes for planting trees and the holes for plants.
11. When you speak to the AHHL House Leader, insist that the sod palettes are placed on the driveway or the street, not on the area to be sodded. In the summer, check for the presence of “fire ants” in the sod. This has happened several times over the years and can cause severe difficulties.
12. Within two weeks following dedication day, the CFMG Team Leader will forward plant information sheets for each plant to Megan Decantillon ([megan.decantillon@atlantahabitat.org](mailto:megan.decantillon@atlantahabitat.org)). The plant information sheets may be found on the [centralfultonmastergardener.org](http://centralfultonmastergardener.org) website under “For Master Gardners.” For those plants not found on the CFMG website, the CFMG team leader is responsible for preparing a plant information sheet (following the format of the plants on the CFMG website). Megan will place the plant info sheets in a folder with other pertinent information supplied by AHH to the homeowner. On planting day, communicate with the homeowner which plants have been installed and go over how to and when to water the plants, trees, and grass. Be flexible on landscaping day as sometimes other people arrive with plants to donate - if possible the CFMG team leader should check with the AHHL in advance to see if she/he knows if this will be happening.
13. Houses will normally get enough sod to cover most of the ground. Each palette of sod contains about 500 sq. ft. Hopefully, enough sod will be supplied. Areas that do not get sod will be seeded. If you notice during your site assessment that the lot may require a lot of sod, bring this to the attention of the AHHL. Conversely, if the lot is entirely or partially shaded, make sure the AHHL knows.
14. Please remember that we are regarded as **skilled supervisors** representing CFMG and Atlanta Habitat for Humanity. As such, please treat the sponsor’s volunteers with care and diplomacy.

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15. CFMG meets with AHH semi-annually to evaluate the landscaping program and to recommend solutions to issues.
16. **Very important: Be prepared on landscaping day to begin work right away - otherwise chaos sets in. The CFMG team leader should assign the other CFMGers to lead the various tasks. Here are guidelines drawn from the experience of the houses we have done so far:**
  - a. Start off by explaining to the volunteers (after the AHHL gives his/her safety talk) what the day will be like. Remind volunteers to drink water, take plants out of the pots (demonstrate how this is done), place the sod green side up, how to prepare the soil for the sod by hard raking, general rules about watering (hose directly into the ground not spraying the leaves). We get a chance to educate 20-30 volunteers at each build about “best practices.” Explain briefly the UGA extension program and that CFMG has been serving as landscaping supervisors since 2009 on the AHH houses.
  - b. Focus on planting the trees, planting the plants and shrubs, and the rain garden first. Assign people to each task Choose the stronger-looking people to plant the trees (it is tough work). Then get volunteers to clear the areas for the plants and dig the holes for the plants (also lay the landscape fabric along the front of the house (to prevent mud splattering on the bricks). Make sure the plant roots are separated before placing in the ground. In the meantime you can get other volunteers to start hard-raking in anticipation of laying sod. If volunteers find big roots that need cutting, the AHHL has a “saws-all” in the truck. Ask for it if needed.
  - c. Each house usually gets one or two good sized trees depending on the site requirements. Place and plant them first, as well as laying the mulch around them.
  - d. Plan and lay out any other plant islands before any sod is installed. Create at least a 15-foot diameter mulch island around mature trees.
  - e. There is sod for the front and seed for the back and sides Start the sod at the front edge of the property and work towards the back. Wheelbarrows can be used to move sod from the palettes to the planting areas; or form a chain of people to move the sod to the desired area. Remember: lay sod perpendicular to the flow of water and stagger the beginning edges of parallel rolls of sod (a brick pattern). In cases where it is apparent that the palettes of sod will not be sufficient and no more is forthcoming, you may have to make adjustments on the fly. Have the people with seed start at the very back and work forward. Use all the

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sod, if possible. As you are laying sod, ask one two of the volunteers to be a “cutter” to trim pieces of sod. Demonstrate how to do this using a machete or utility knives (found in the AHHL’s truck).

- f. In general, sod must be placed along the edge of the lawn bordering a sidewalk or a street.
- g. Sod must be placed in the “hell zone,” i.e, the strip between the sidewalk and street. However, not all sites contain a hell zone.
- h. We are required to install one or two rain gardens at each site except for subdivisions with retention ponds. The location of the rain garden(s) is indicated on the building plans. These areas have been scarified and filled with “good” dirt to ease planting. Normally fill the rain garden with liriope, daylillies (as noted on the plant list or the site), and wood chips (and leftover Natures’ Helper.) The rain gardens have been getting greater attention from the city inspectors. Ensure that the downslope edge is raised (like a berm—8” high). This is usually done when the yard is graded. If not, push the dirt in the rain garden downslope to establish the 8” high berm. In some cases the location of a rain garden and the location of a tree coincide on the house’s plans. If that is the case, the tree represents the plant for the rain garden. The rain garden cannot be placed within the right-of-way in the front yard. AHH will try to outline the location of the rain garden, however this is not guaranteed, so use your judgment. If the rain garden is located in a sodded area, sod must be placed up on the sides and on top of the berm. In all likelihood, this will not be the case in a back yard, but may occur in a front yard. Check with the AHHL.
- i. Remember to incorporate curved lines for planting beds and plant alignment; plant in odd numbers, 3, 5, 7, etc.
- j. Remember the extra watering requirements between May and September.
- k. Place wheelbarrows around the property to collect the ‘natural debris.’ Tree roots and rocks and all the “natural leftovers” need to be placed in the back of the lot and hidden as well as possible. Rocks sometimes can be used as landscaping features or to line pine islands. Ideally, no “nature’ goes back to the warehouse in the landscape trailer at the end of the day.
- l. Distribute several large black plastic trash bags (found on the AHHL’s trailer) around the site. These are used for plastic, metal, or other non-natural materials that go back to the warehouse. These bags will be placed on the AHHL’s trailer during clean-up.

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- m. This is a new (May 2023) requirement: lay two rows of sod parallel to the pine straw that is placed around the three sides of the house.
- n. Provide a sketch of the plantings indicating the location of each installed plant, tree, and grass. Review the planting plan with the home owner and explain the proper watering regime for trees, plants, and grass.
- o. Present this information to the Homeowner.
- p. Take pictures of the finished landscape - and congratulate yourselves on a job well done. (We can use the pix for CFMG publicity).
- q. Make any suggestions you think helpful to our group so we may be more efficient in the future.
- r. By providing your phone number and or email address to the homeowner, you may ask the homeowner if she/he would like a follow-up visit. This follow-up visit should be scheduled about three months after the move-in date. You may also do a “drive-by” and then contact the owner to find out if the owner has any questions. The homeowner usually moves in a month to 6 weeks following dedication day.
- s. **Communication with the AHH house leader before and during landscaping day:** For the CFMG team leader: visit the site a week or two before the work day to get an idea of the lay of the land and if you can determine if there will be any unusual conditions. Remind the AHHL of any special needs, including the proper type and number of tools, problems with placement of trees, plants, and rain garden as shown on plans, ivy on trees, poison ivy, soft request from sponsor for additional plants (especially for the rain garden). Request that the AHHL ask any volunteer/sponsor desiring to donate plants to connect with the CFMG team leader to determine needs and appropriateness of plants. Ask the AHHL if specific problems have arisen recently with landscaping on other AHH houses.
- t. If you sustain a wound or in injury while working on an AHH house or are involved in an accident traveling to and from the location, report this incident to our Fulton County agent. It is our understanding that all certified Master Gardeners are covered by UGA while on the job and traveling to and from an approved job location.
- u. The hours worked on an AHH project are to be entered into MGLOG. No further documentation is required.