

Homeowners Associations are classified as nonprofit organizations; therefore they legally have to have rules and bylaws in place. If you want to enact change, first you must have an understanding of those rules - both the Declarations of Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs), which defines the organization's powers and responsibilities, as well as the duties and rights of homeowners within the HOA, as well as the bylaws, which detail how the HOA operates.

Ask your HOA for these documents or find them online. You should also understand any state laws that apply to your situation, which can be found on your state government's website. HOAs must follow these laws, and if they are not, this is where you begin.

Attend HOA meetings, introduce yourself, and evaluate the current climate of the board. Talk to other homeowners, talk to board members, and get a feel for whether the change you are seeking may be an easy lift. Before you contact your HOA, be clear about exactly what it is you are asking for. Do your research, be ready to back it up with evidence, include how the proposed change will benefit the community, and have a convincing argument.

Steps:

- 1) Submit a proposal describing the changes to the bylaw or covenant to the board.
- 2) The board will review and discuss the proposed amendment during a board meeting, at which time homeowners in attendance can provide input. Make sure you attend!
- 3) The membership will vote for or against the proposed amendment. A majority vote is required (varies by HOA).
- 4) If approved, changes to the CC&Rs must be submitted to the county recorder's office for their files, but not for bylaws - only members must be notified of these changes.

Often HOA rules were codified decades ago, and updates will be welcomed by all; however, this won't always be the case, and often resistance will be met. Sometimes outdated landscaping rules, such as those dealing with excess water usage, are in direct conflict with new city conservation measures, and involving the local or state government is all it might take. Some states have laws that prevent HOAs from banning water conscious landscaping, for example. Other states protect gardener's rights.

If met with resistance, don't give up! Here are some tips:

Start small - baby steps. Agree to install habitat in your less visible backyard rather than the very public facing front yard.

Educate the HOA about the value of gardening with native plants. Explain how they benefit the ecosystem, provide wildlife habitat, and conserve water. Address their concerns, such as the potential for attracting pests and looking unkempt. Be positive and encouraging and keep the lines of communication open.

Document well-done examples to show the board what you have in mind. Include photos of native plants you are going to include. Help them visualize it and show them it will be attractive.

Offer to help develop guidelines for installing habitat that are acceptable to them. Ideas include developing an approved list of plants, outlining rules for maintenance, and determining a garden size that is appropriate.

Talk to your neighbors about your ideas. Get them on board. Use tools available to you such as your HOA's social media pages, flyers, and HOA meetings to spread the word and encourage their involvement.

Garner support for a small demonstration garden to show the benefits of gardening for wildlife, and recruit volunteers to help build it.

Incorporate signage explaining what your space is all about. Pollinator Partnership has [free printable signs](#), and if you join their [Bee Friendly Gardening](#) program you are eligible to purchase this attractive metal sign. Additionally, you can request a letter of support indicating your habitat is registered with Pollinator Partnership.

