



FREE RESOURCE

# The Arizona Backyard *Investment Guide*

Everything you need to know before redesigning your East Valley backyard -- costs, rebates, permits, materials, and what actually lasts in the desert.

- + The real cost of a full backyard remodel
- + How turf, hardscape & irrigation pay for themselves
- + 2026 city rebate guide -- all East Valley cities
- + Permit & HOA checklist before you start
- + Material guide -- what holds up in Arizona heat
- + Real before/after project context
- + The Shadetree design & build process

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Shadetree Landscape Design \* Owner-supervised since 1989 \* Tempe, AZ

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Most homeowners think about landscaping as a cost. The ones who have done it well think about it as one of the highest-return investments they made in their home. This guide is written to help you think about it the same way.

A well-designed East Valley backyard does three things financially: it reduces your ongoing costs (water bills, lawn maintenance, repairs), it adds measurable value to your home, and in many cases qualifies for city rebate programs that pay you to make the change. The combination of these three factors is what makes a backyard remodel different from most home improvement projects.

*"We designed this guide for homeowners who are seriously thinking about a backyard redesign but are not sure where to start -- or who want to go into contractor conversations knowing exactly what to ask."*

-- Chris Flores, Owner, Shadetree Landscape Design

35+

Years in Arizona

2,000+

Projects completed

5.0

Star rating

7

Cities served

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS GUIDE

Honest price ranges for hardscaping, turf, water features, BBQ kitchens, and fire pits -- based on 35 years of real East Valley project data.

Water savings, maintenance elimination, and home value increases quantified -- with typical payback timelines for the most common projects.

Current rebate amounts and program status for every city in the East Valley -- what is active, what is closed, and what to do before you start.

What triggers a city permit, how HOA approval works, and what Arizona HB 2131 means for homeowners who want to install synthetic turf.

## **Material guide**

What holds up in Arizona heat and what does not -- plain English, no contractor jargon.

# What a full East Valley backyard remodel actually costs

These ranges come from 35 years of real Phoenix metro projects -- not national pricing databases. All prices include materials, labor, and standard site prep. Caliche removal, complex drainage, demolition of existing concrete, and premium material upgrades push costs toward the higher end.

| Service                | Typical installed range                                     | What drives cost up                                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Travertine hardscaping | <b>\$11--\$15/sqft \$33k--\$90k for 3,000--6,000 sqft</b>   | Material grade, caliche depth, drainage complexity, demo          |
| Synthetic turf         | <b>\$8--\$15/sqft Typical front yard: \$4k--\$12k</b>       | Yard size, base prep needed, infill type, UV heat-reduction grade |
| Outdoor kitchen / BBQ  | <b>\$8,000--\$25,000+ Appliance selection varies widely</b> | Appliance grade, gas line distance, stone finish, island size     |
| Custom water feature   | <b>\$3,500--\$15,000+ Pool integration varies</b>           | Size, stone type, pump system, lighting, pool coordination        |
| Built-in gas fire pit  | <b>\$3,000--\$12,000 Gas line adds \$800--\$2,500</b>       | Stone selection, gas vs propane, seating walls, permits           |
| Full backyard remodel  | <b>\$35,000--\$120,000+ Premium estates higher</b>          | Scope, number of services, existing conditions, pool work         |

Every Shadetree project includes a free on-site consultation with a detailed estimate before any commitment. No guesswork, no ranges after you have already agreed to move forward. Call (602) 610-6257 or visit [shadetreelandscapes.com](http://shadetreelandscapes.com).

# How a backyard remodel pays for itself over time

A backyard remodel typically pays back through three channels simultaneously: reduced ongoing costs, increased home value, and in many cases city rebates. Here is how each one works in the East Valley specifically.

## 1. Water savings -- the biggest driver for turf

Outdoor irrigation accounts for up to 70% of residential water use in Arizona. A typical East Valley homeowner with a standard lawn spends \$2,400--\$4,800 per year on outdoor water alone. Synthetic turf eliminates nearly all of that on day one. At current water rates, most turf installations pay for themselves in water savings alone within 3--6 years -- then keep saving money for 15--20 years after that.

**+ 3--6 year payback on water savings alone**

## 2. Maintenance elimination

The average East Valley homeowner with a maintained natural lawn spends \$150--\$300/month on lawn service, fertilizing, re-seeding, and irrigation maintenance. Synthetic turf eliminates this entirely. Over a 10-year period, that is \$18,000--\$36,000 in maintenance costs that simply disappear.

**+ \$18k--\$36k saved over 10 years in maintenance alone**

## 3. Home value increase

In the Scottsdale and Tempe market, professionally designed outdoor living spaces consistently add 10--15% to a home's perceived value at sale. Buyers in the East Valley expect finished outdoor spaces -- homes without them routinely sell at a discount compared to comparable properties that have them. A \$60,000 backyard remodel on a \$600,000 home that adds 10% value has effectively paid for itself at closing.

**+ 10--15% typical home value increase in the East Valley**

## 4. City rebates -- money back before you start

Multiple cities in the Phoenix metro will write you a check for removing your grass. Phoenix pays \$2/sqft up to \$3,000. Chandler pays \$1.50/sqft up to \$2,000. Mesa pays up to \$2,100. Tempe pays \$0.50/sqft up to \$2,000. These are not loans -- they are direct payments that reduce your project cost from day one. See the next page for full details.

**+ Up to \$3,000 in rebates available -- current as of mid-2026**

# City-by-city rebate programs -- East Valley

These programs are real and funded -- but they require pre-approval before any work begins. Starting without written city approval permanently disqualifies you from the rebate. We verify current status and handle pre-approval coordination for every qualifying project.

| City       | Amount      | Max payout | Status       | Key requirement                            |
|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Phoenix    | \$2.00/sqft | \$3,000    | + Active     | Grass removal + xeriscape replacement      |
| Chandler   | \$1.50/sqft | \$2,000    | + Active     | Desert plants required alongside turf      |
| Mesa       | Varies      | \$2,100    | + Active     | 50% plant coverage required                |
| Tempe      | \$0.50/sqft | \$2,000    | + Active     | 30% plant coverage + pre-approval required |
| Scottsdale | Was \$5,000 | --         | x Closed     | Expected to reopen -- verify with us       |
| Gilbert    | Available   | Varies     | Check status | Verify current status during consultation  |

Amounts current as of mid-2026. Programs can change -- Scottsdale's closed in late 2025 with limited notice. We verify current status for your city before every project. Tempe also offers a TreeBate: up to \$75 per qualifying desert tree planted as part of a grass conversion.

## THE CRITICAL RULE: APPLY BEFORE YOU START



Every rebate program requires written pre-approval before any work begins. If you remove your grass, install turf, or start any qualifying project before receiving a Notice to Proceed from the city, you are permanently disqualified -- even if your project would have fully qualified. We handle this step as part of every project planning process.

## HOW THE REBATE PROCESS WORKS

|        |                                                                           |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Step 1 | Apply and get written pre-approval from your city before any work begins. |
| Step 2 | Schedule and pass the required pre-inspection of your existing yard.      |

|        |                                                                              |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Step 3 | Complete the approved scope of work including any plant coverage minimums.   |
| Step 4 | Pass final inspection and submit for direct payment to you as the homeowner. |

# What approvals you need before starting any project

Two separate approval systems affect East Valley homeowners: city permits and HOA architectural review. They are completely independent of each other. Getting one does not satisfy the other.

## City permits -- when you need one

Standard planting, mulching, and basic grading typically do not require a city permit. Once you add structural elements or utility connections, permits are usually required:

- + Retaining walls above certain heights (threshold varies by city)
- + Gas line installation or alteration for outdoor kitchens or fire pits
- + Plumbing connections for outdoor sinks
- + Pool construction or removal
- + Electrical work for outdoor lighting or appliances

**In Tempe: All permit applications submitted through the Citizen Access Portal online. Gas piping regulated under the city's fuel gas code.**

**In Scottsdale: Gas and plumbing work requires a plumbing permit. Masonry fireplaces, fire pits, and BBQs may need planning approval. Rebate projects require a pre-inspection and Notice to Proceed.**

**In Chandler: Standard landscaping usually no permit. Gas, plumbing, electrical, and retaining walls require permits.**

## HOA approval -- a completely separate process

City permit approval does NOT replace HOA approval. These are two completely separate processes run by two completely separate organizations. Getting your permit but not your HOA approval can result in being required to remove completed work at your own expense. We recommend confirming your HOA requirements during the design phase -- before permits are pulled and before any materials are ordered.

#### ARIZONA HB 2131 -- THE TURF HOA RULE

*Arizona passed HB 2131, which prevents HOAs from prohibiting the installation of synthetic turf where natural grass is otherwise permitted on the property. Many East Valley HOAs that previously restricted turf may no longer be able to enforce that ban. If your HOA said no in the past, it is worth asking again.*

# What holds up in Arizona heat -- and what doesn't

Not every material performs the same in extreme heat and UV exposure. This is a plain-English breakdown of the most common landscaping materials and how they actually perform in the East Valley over time.

| Material               | AZ heat performance                    | Durability              | Best uses                         |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Natural Travertine     | Excellent Stays cooler than concrete   | 25+ years               | Pool decks, patios, entries       |
| Concrete Pavers        | Good Color may fade in UV over time    | 20+ years               | Driveways, walkways, large patios |
| Natural Flagstone      | Good Hot in direct sun                 | Decades                 | Retaining walls, steps, accents   |
| Premium Synthetic Turf | Good with heat-reduction tech          | 15--25 years            | Lawns, side yards, play areas     |
| Standard Concrete      | Poor Absorbs and radiates extreme heat | 10--15 years (cracks)   | Utility/structural only           |
| Natural Grass          | Poor 55+ gal/sqft/year required in AZ  | Requires constant input | Small areas if HOA requires it    |

## A NOTE ON STANDARD CONCRETE

We regularly see East Valley homeowners dealing with cracked, heat-absorbing concrete patios installed by previous contractors. Travertine and structural pavers both significantly outperform standard concrete in this climate. In most cases, factoring in maintenance and eventual replacement, they are also the better long-term financial choice. Ask us about the math during your free consultation.

## NOTES ON CALICHE SOIL

Much of the East Valley sits on caliche -- a dense calcium-rich clay layer that blocks water from draining naturally and makes it hard for plant roots to penetrate. Caliche depth varies by location. It needs to be identified during excavation and addressed before building on top of it -- water that cannot drain through caliche will push up against whatever structure sits above it. We check for caliche during every free consultation.

# The Shadetree design & build process

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Every Shadetree project follows the same disciplined process -- because getting the early steps right determines whether the finished project looks exactly as planned or ends up with problems that are expensive to fix later.

- 01 Free on-site design consultation**  
Chris Flores walks your property personally, listens to your vision, and assesses your space -- sun exposure, soil conditions, drainage, and HOA requirements. No pressure, no obligation. Rebate eligibility and permit requirements are identified at this stage.
  - 02 Custom design + detailed plan**  
Our team creates a detailed plan tailored to your goals, your climate, and your budget. We collaborate with you on every detail until the design is exactly right. Rebate pre-approval applications are submitted at this stage if applicable.
  - 03 Permit coordination**  
Where city permits are required -- gas lines, structural work, pools, electrical -- we coordinate the submission and inspection process on your behalf. You do not need to navigate city permit systems yourself.
  - 04 Precision installation**  
Our skilled team executes with precision, keeping you updated throughout. Chris Flores personally supervises critical stages of every build -- he is on site, not checking in by phone.
  - 05 Owner walkthrough & sign-off**  
Chris walks the finished project with you personally before it is considered complete. If anything is not exactly right, we fix it before we leave.
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## Ready to start your project?

Book a free, no-pressure on-site consultation with Chris Flores. He will walk your property, talk through your vision, and give you a real plan with real numbers -- no guesswork, no obligation.

**(602) 610-6257**

[shadetreelandscape.com](http://shadetreelandscape.com)

[info@shadetreelandscape.com](mailto:info@shadetreelandscape.com)

### Our Services

- + Hardscaping & premium pavers
- + Water features & pools
- + Premium turf installation
- + BBQ & outdoor kitchens
- + Fire pits & outdoor living

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Chandler \* Gilbert \* Phoenix \* Ahwatukee