



SAWS Soil Evaluation Frequently Asked Questions

1) I've not heard of this soil requirement under newly installed sod. Is this a new SAWS rule?

- a. The requirement for at least 4" of soil under newly installed sod has been in the San Antonio City Ordinance since January 1, 2006. Refer to Chapter 34, Section 275, (4) "Turfgrass soil support." This rule was also added to the SAWS Utility Service Regulations in June 2024 so that it applies to all locations receiving SAWS water service.

2) Does this requirement apply to trees or plants in landscape beds?

- a. This requirement applies only to newly installed sod at new construction sites. However, it is good for plants and trees to have plenty of soil in which to grow, flourish and develop resilience to drought conditions.

3) Why does soil matter?

- a. Soil is the "gas tank" for the sod. Water and nutrients are stored in the soil and used by the roots between irrigation/rain events. The deeper the soil, the more storage capacity for water and the deeper the roots can grow. Deeper roots mean better drought tolerance.

4) Can I use any type of soil?

- a. Viable soil must contain at least 6% organic matter (1/4 inch of organic matter per 4" of depth, must be able to retain water, and must not contain more than 10% non-soil matter (rocks, gravel, wood, trash, etc).

5) What is not considered viable soil?

- a. Gravel, sand, rocks, wood mulch, wood shavings, reclaimed asphalt, road base, caliche, glass, plastic, rubber mulch or construction trash.

6) Can I use soil containing sand?

- a. Yes, but sand cannot comprise more than 40% of the soil unless the sod is being laid on an athletic field. Athletic fields are not the same as home landscapes and would not apply in this situation.

7) Can I use native soil at the site?

- a. YES. If the site hasn't been scraped to remove topsoil and includes native soil that holds water and contains adequate organic matter, it may certainly be used.

8) I'm hydroseeding some areas on the site. Do I need 4" of soil under the hydroseed?

- a. NO, if applying hydroseed to prevent erosion on drainage areas or non-managed areas.
- b. YES, if applying hydroseed to a managed area like a lawn or common area or open space.

9) How will SAWS measure the depth of the soil?

- a. SAWS will use a hollow core probe to take several measurement samples across the site and to examine soil content.

10) What happens if the soil at my site isn't deep enough?

- a. **If the sod is laid on hardpan or rock, SAWS Conservation requires the sod to be pulled up and the full 4" of acceptable soil be laid down before re-installing the sod. A follow up inspection will be required.**
- b. If the soil is between 3-4" deep across the site, you will be required to add 1" of compost as a top-dress to all the sod areas before the soil evaluation is approved.
- c. For the first 6 months of 2026:
 - i. If the soil is less than 3" deep, but not hardpan, 1" of compost will be required as a top-dress and the builder will receive a strike.
 - ii. If the builder receives three strikes within the first 6 months, SAWS may require the sod to be pulled up and the proper depth of soil laid down.

11) Does sod have to be installed for the operational inspection?

- a. No. If sod is not installed at the time of the operational inspection, it is SAWS' expectation that the soil areas will be raked clean and be free of all debris (rocks, wood, trash, non-soil items) PRIOR TO the inspection. The soil evaluation will be considered a non-pass if the location is not raked clean prior to the inspection.

12) What if I'm laying new sod at an existing location? Do I need 4" of soil?

- a. The 4" soil requirement only applies to new construction.
- b. Landscape variances may not be available for laying new sod at existing locations. Please check the [SAWS website](#) for more information.