A Home Owners Association (HOA) is an organization of property owners that administers the rules and upholds the covenants of a subdivision, development or condominium complex. So, if you live in a neighborhood with an HOA, its rules affect and limit what you can do to your property. That's good news in many ways.

The bad news is that you can't necessarily do what you want to do with your own private property. So, if you wish to convert your landscape to native plants, it is best (as with all things in life!) to take a positive approach. If the rules are outdated or are not reasonable, you can and should work constructively within your HOA process to get the rules changed. The HOA Committee Members are not ‘the bad guys’! The primary goal of the HOA covenants, bylaws and Committee is to maintain a reasonable standard within the community to ensure a pleasing place to live for all residents and to maintain property values.

Here are some tips to use when wanting to install a native landscape.

1) **Study the HOA's rules and bylaws so that you understand what you can and cannot do.**
   a. There are many “urban myths” about HOA rules, so be sure you read the requirements carefully before making a big fuss. Almost certainly, the rules allow you to landscape your property with native plants.
   b. If you don't understand a rule or its nuances, ask the HOA questions. They will see that you are truly interested and respect what they are doing. They might also realize the rules need clarification or updating.
   c. Understand the intentions of the HOA's Committee Members. How can you help to meet their needs?
   d. What guidelines are used to evaluate requests beyond the written rules, such as “maintain a certain look” – similar to that of your neighbors, no garish house colors, etc.

2) **Learn the structure of the HOA governing board and the various committees.**
   a. Attitudes change and rules always lag so you will need support to get the rules changed.
   b. Attend HOA meetings and get to know committee members and others who attend the meetings.
   c. Try to determine who might be a reasonable advocate to help you with your cause.

3) **Focus on what actions can be taken.**
   a. Rather than harp on what you cannot change, focus on the steps you can take to move forward in the situation.
   b. Don’t be too quick to point out there’s something not right with them or the way the HOA does things. The focus should be on “how to solve the problem” and not on “what’s wrong.”
   c. Be sure you have what you want to do well-defined and present the HOA with specific requests and not generalities. Provide supporting pictures, diagrams, lists, etc. to help the committee visualize and better understand what you want to do.

4) **Power is in numbers.**
   a. If you find you want to do something not allowed by the current rules and there are other homeowners who feel the same way, join with them. You might never talk to some of your neighbors, but they are paying the same monthly dues and working to stick to the same regulations, so you have a lot in common, and this might come in handy.
   b. Also, if you can determine what your neighbors might object to, you'll learn a lot about what the HOA might also find objectionable and you can be prepared with answers to possible concerns when you do approach the HOA.

Native Plant Society of Texas
Randy Pensabene 8/1/14
HOW TO WORK CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH YOUR HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

5) **DO NOT TAKE A CONFRONTATIONAL APPROACH!** Treat the HOA committee members with respect and professionalism, just as you expect to be treated.
   a. This approach is by far the best way to get committee members to collaborate and work with you. If you go in with a bad attitude, you will only foster ill-will and committee members will have no desire to work with you to resolve the issue(s).
   b. No one likes to be treated as if they are stupid/incapable/incompetent. If you are going to treat the person with disrespect, it's not going to be surprising if you are treated the same way. You will reap what you sow!
   c. Never, ever raise your voice in anger or appear to bully committee members. This rule should not have to be said, but it does.

6) **Sit down and talk about what they care about and are concerned about.**
   a. Explain to your HOA what you're seeing and experiencing. How does this rule impact the community, the environment, the wildlife, etc…
   b. Allow the HOA Committee Members to share their opinion and explain their point of view. Don't disagree with individual points made; listen to the whole story. Carefully and thoughtfully consider their point of view and take your time to respond. Knee-jerk hostile reactions will only be met with hostility in return.
   c. Identify common ground. Point out what you both agree on. You may find that the source of your conflict is actually an area of mutual interest and rather than being enemies, you are natural allies.
   d. Propose a solution. Use the information you gathered to offer a resolution. Provide concrete recommendations for how the rules might be changed. Be sure to keep them couched as ‘recommendations’ and not as demands. This should incorporate the HOA perspective.

7) **What if you simply can’t agree in the end?**
   a. Have realistic expectations. Is what you wish to do appropriate for your neighborhood? Your neighbors’ wishes must also be considered by the HOA.
   b. Make those changes that are allowed and remember that you agreed to abide by the HOA rules when you bought into that neighborhood. Things often evolve over time and so will the rules.
   c. Nibble away at the rules. Request small changes that are reasonable and little by little things will progress.
   d. HOAs are always looking for volunteers to be on the committee. Get involved; help to change the rules if they are not reasonable. When applying, do not appear to have “an agenda” to fix the rules, but instead indicate that you want to help your community function better.
   e. With a positive approach, you can influence future rules.