

ALTERNATIVES TO LAWNS: Inspiration and Ideas for Ecological Design



WHY DO WE LIKE LAWNS?

- Lawns do some things best
- Green denotes lush, moist, abundant
- Historically “safe”—no hidden enemies
- Maybe we don’t know what else to do
- Traditional—England & East Coast
- Negative space is a restful contrast
- To fit in with neighborhood style

WHAT’S WRONG WITH LAWNS?

- Monoculture is ecologically unbalanced
- High fossil fuel input—gasoline, chemicals
- Reduces habitat diversity
- High water usage
- Pesticides & herbicides are poisonous
- Labor intensive

STYLES & INTERPRETATIONS

- California Native
- Modern/Contemporary
- Woodland
- Mediterranean
- Asian/Japanese
- English Cottage Garden
- Formal/European/Italian/French
- Eclectic

IDEAS

- Children’s Garden
- Butterfly Garden
- Habitat Garden
- Sculpture Garden
- Herb Garden
- Zen Meditation Garden
- Cactus/Desert Garden
- Games
- Electric train garden
- Outdoor camping area with a fire circle
- Fairy Garden
- Water Garden
- Bird Watching Garden
- Edible Garden
- Cutting Flower Garden
- Feng Shui Garden
- Rock Garden
- Dog garden (include a ‘digging area’ to hide bones)

RESOURCES

Going Native Garden Tour - April goingnativegardentour.org
California Native Plant Society www.cnps.org
Yerba Buena Demonstration Garden www.yerbabuenanursery.com
Professional Lawn Replacement www.naturalfrontyards.com
California Native Garden Foundation www.cngf.org
Sustainable Landscaping Site with lists of professionals and pictures
www.landscapestandards.com

HERBAL "LAWNS"

- Woolly Thyme, Creeping Thyme, Elfin Thyme
- Yarrow
- Corsican Mint
- Chamomile
- Sweet Woodruff
- Yerba Buena

MEADOWS of "No Mow" Grasses

- Seasonal changes
- Flowers sway in the breeze
- Can be mowed as a traditional lawn
- Can be weed whacked annually
- Provide habitat for birds, butterflies
- Can be interplanted with wildflowers

Running Grasses

Dune Sedge *Carex pansa*

Foothill Sedge *C. praegracilis*

Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*

(*Molate and Jughandle var.*)

Idaho Fescue *Festuca idahoensis*

Bunching Grasses

Berkeley Sedge *Carex divulsa*

California Fescue *Festuca californica*

Leafy Reed Grass *Calamagrostis foliosa*

June Grass *Koeleria*

macrantha

Purple Needle Grass *Nasella pulchra*

ESTABLISHING A MEADOW

- Relaxed attitude around perfection/change
- Decide on type of grass
- Mixed with flowers?
- Transplants or seed?
- Pre-germination of existing weed seeds
- Weeding important until established

ECO-LAWN: Mixture of clover, yarrow & dwarf fescues, use seed

NATIVE MEADOW GRASS NOW AVAILABLE IN SOD (\$1.60-1.90/sft)

Capitol Wholesale Nursery www.capitolwholesalenursery.com

Native Revival Nursery www.nativerivival.com

ARTIFICIAL LAWN: never needs mowing or watering – but can't recycle it and is hot (and doesn't improve the environment like plants do)

DROUGHT TOLERANT GROUND COVERS

Manzanita, Rosemary, Dwarf Coyote Bush, Dwarf Ceanothus,

Dymondia, Beach Strawberry, Lowfast Cotoneaster

SANTA MONICA DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

- ¼ of the maintenance labor
- 3/5 of the green waste
- 1/10 of the water

To view online: www.santa-monica.org/epd/news/gardengarden.htm

HOW TO REMOVE YOUR LAWN DEVA LUNA 9/9/2009
EarthCare Landscaping www.earthcareland.com 408-871-2792

- Turf covers 32 million acres of land in U.S., which is 2% of the land mass!
- Lawn mowers account for 5% of air pollution (a 3.5 hp lawnmower for one hour = driving an automobile 350 miles)
- 30-60% of urban fresh water is used to water lawns
- 2000 sft lawn produces 600-800 lb. clippings per summer

WHAT KIND OF LAWN DO YOU HAVE:

- Turf without perennial weeds
- Turf with perennial weeds like Bermuda Grass, St. Augustine Grass (invasive running grasses) or Oxalis – needs a different strategy

GENERAL PRINCIPLES Natural processes can aide you, shade out lawn and let it decompose. Must be persistant and thorough

TECHNIQUES:

Scalp (and then smother)

- Weed Whacker (String Trimmer)
- Lawn mower, on lowest setting
- Sheep

Sod cut and flip

Rototill

Solarize

- During hot weather
- Scalp the turf
- (optional, add compost or manure)
- Moist soil
- Clear plastic
- Tack down edges
- No air pockets
- 6-8 weeks
- Sterilizes the top 3-4” of soil

Chicken Tractor

Sheet compost

- One possible lawn removal “recipe”
 - 1” manure or alfalfa (high N)
 - 5 layers newspapers (weed barrier)
 - 2” compost
 - 3” free arbor mulch
 - 1” purchased bark chips on top
- Layers of organic matter that you can plant directly into
- Make a planting pocket of good soil
- Similar to Lasagna Gardening

- You can flip the sod over so the grass is upside-down. Let it rot.

- Edge pieces can be flipped and piled into mounds

Sod cut and give away

- Put an ad on Craigslist or Freecycle

Remove

- Small areas, use pick & shovel
- Rent a sod-cutter if grade too high, or noxious weeds are present
- Remove to landfill or other location to dry out thoroughly
- Two passes may be necessary
- Rototill, and rake out Bermuda
- Follow up by spot weeding anything that re-sprouts

CALCULATOR: Bulk materials are measured in cubic yards. To figure how many yards you need: Square foot coverage (width x length) X number of inches of depth. Then divide by 324.
Example: to put 3” of mulch on a 20 x 30 area = 600sft
 $3 \times 600 = 1800 / 324 = 5.555 = 5 \frac{1}{2}$ yards.

INTRODUCING “NATURAL FRONT YARDS”

www.naturalfrontyards.com/home (temporary URL while building website)

EarthCare’s goals with this program:

- Helping the planet by making lawn replacement easy and inexpensive
- Lower cost due to screening clients, smaller plants, minimal procedures, less sourcing and design time.
- Improve soil health naturally over time, counteract compaction with AACT, oyster shell and fungi
- Save water, save the air, save money, help native birds/bees

“NATURAL FRONT YARDS DETAILS:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For front yards only, if qualified• Starts at \$3/sft. (compare to typical landscape costs of \$10-\$20 sft.)• Choose Add-ons to customize• Maintenance for 1 year included• Limited choices & smaller plants• Help with the rebate paperwork• Primarily CA natives | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose from 5 Design Themes DESIGN THEMES: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• California Coastal• Contemporary• Mediterranean• Zen/Meditative• Woodland |
|---|---|

PROCEDURES:

- Scalp lawn (not effective for Bermuda & Oxalis!)
- Carve back soil at edges of hardscape (use this soil to make mounds)
- Install valves & controller, drip irrigation line on surface
- Sprinkle with oyster shell powder
- Arrange small drought tolerant plants, proper spacing
- Plant high, using mycorrhizae on the scuffed-up root balls
- Add emitters to driplines
- Cover ground with newspapers and then free mulch, thickly
- Put an attractive mulch on top, can make contrasting paths
- Spray with AACT (Compost Tea)

REBATES: www.valleywater.org

- Santa Clara Valley Water District offers rebates to replace your lawn with appropriate plants, drip irrigation and permeable surfaces.
- \$.75/sft up to \$1,000, material costs reimbursed
- Commercial properties up to \$10,000
- Palo Alto, Morgan Hill and Milpitas will match

RESOURCES

Comparative example: www.santa-monica.org/epd/news/gardengarden.htm

Going Native Garden Tour - April 20, 2008 www.goingnativegardentour.org

California Native Plant Society www.cnps.org

Yerba Buena Demonstration Garden www.yerbabuenanursery.com

EarthCare’s affordable lawn replacement program www.naturalfrontyards.com

Alrie Middlebrook’s “Lose the Lawn” www.losethelawn.com

A wiki site for Sustainable Landscaping with lists of professionals and pictures

www.landscapestandards.com

