

Low Water Use Turf Choices

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For some, a beautiful green lawn is an invitation for a variety of activities: kids playing, picnics, wicked game of croquet, lovely garden parties. For others it is merely a placeholder, a seemingly easy way to have a yard, an essential part of having that traditional look. For non-lawn lovers, it means neighbors awakened by loud lawn mowers, fretting over the weeds, watering, and fertilizing, a huge time and water waster.

A NASA-funded study found that, including golf courses, lawns in the United States cover nearly fifty thousand square miles—an area roughly the size of New York State. In order to keep all the lawns in the country well irrigated, the author of the study concluded it would take two hundred gallons of water per person, per day. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates nearly a third of all residential water use in the United States currently goes toward landscaping. 95% of American lawns consist of thirsty bluegrass.

If you are interested in reducing your water usage and having a lawn, you can make turf and design choices that will help. Some of the turf choices will provide a thick thatch that will also help keep weeds at bay. As with any new plantings, until the turf is established it will need regular watering. After the turf is established the watering needs are less.

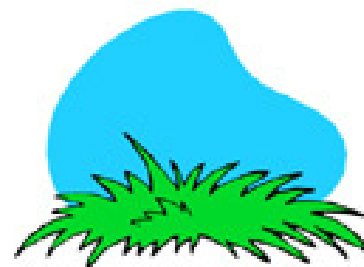
This chart compares various characteristics of *Turf species best adapted to most California Conditions*, and can be found at this link <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/pdf/8035.pdf>. Hopefully it contain information that will help you in making your decision.

Turf species best adapted to most California conditions								
Turf species	Tolerance						Temperature adaptation	Planting method
	Heat	Cold	Drought	Shade	Salinity	Wear/Traffic		
<u>Bermudagrass</u>	High	Low	High	Low	High	High	Warm-season	Seed, sod, stolons, sprigs, plug
<u>Kentucky bluegrass</u>	Low	High	Low	Mod	Low	Mod	Cool-season	Seed, sod
<u>Perennial ryegrass</u>	Low	High	Low	Low	Mod	High	Cool-season	Seed, sod
<u>Red fescue</u>	Low	High	Mod	High	Low	Mod	Cool-season	Seed, sod
<u>St. Augustinegrass</u>	High	Low	Mod	High	High	Mod	Warm-season	Sod, stolon
<u>Tall fescue</u>	Mod-high	Mod	Mod	Mod	Mod	Mod-high	Cool-season	Seed, sod

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As with all design ideas concerning your yard, it is important to determine how you want to use the area and what you want it to look like. Design choices include reducing the amount of lawn needed by creating beds around the lawn area, and not limiting yourself to only one kind of turf. You might plant one kind of turf for the play area, another for a lightly trafficked highlight zone and third for the deep shade. Also, a very quick way to reduce your watering to nearly zero is by using synthetic or artificial turf. Today there are many companies creating beautiful synthetic turf, some out of recycled material that are soft, smooth and easy on the eye. Or think about a different type of low growing ground cover, step-able thyme or an ornamental grass that needs little to no shearing.



If you choose to plant turf grasses, you have two basic choices: warm and cool season grasses. In our area, cool season grasses are green year round while warm season grasses go dormant in the fall when temperatures fall below 55 degrees. Then they turn brown. Warm season grasses aren't as desirable because of their dormancy; however maintenance costs and water usage are reduced due to the shorter growing season.

Fescues are low maintenance and are the most drought tolerant of the cool season grasses. They use 75% less water than other grasses. Tall turf type fescues are drought tolerant due to the deep root system which allows them to pull water from greater depths in the soil. Many varieties of all these grasses, including fescues and blends are on the market today.

Kinds of Turf	<i>Drought Tolerance High to Low</i>
*Hybrid Bermuda Grass	a high level of management is needed
*Zoysia Grass	well-adapted to only the warmest areas of California
*Common Bermuda Grass	ordinary management
*St. Augustine Grass	excellent shade tolerance
*Kikuyu grass	weedy grass, tolerant of low fertility, drought and frequent close mowing
*Tall Fescue	least maintenance, tolerant of heat and drought
*Red Fescue	does not do well in hot climates except in shady, dry conditions

*warm season grasses * cool season grasses

Alternatives to changing your lawn to save water include learning to irrigate more efficiently. Deep watering is always best for lawns. Lawn roots should extend six or more inches and each watering should be long enough to wet soil to the bottom of the root zone. Be careful though, deep watering does not mean over-watering. Learn what your lawn needs, and water in the early morning hours. For guidelines, see <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF/MAINTAIN/irrigate.html>

Re-thinking your lawn and changing your irrigation methods to save water will cause some work at the outset, but in the long run it will save you money without diminishing the beauty of your yard. *

Landscape with watering in mind