

# ALTERNATIVES TO LAWNS: Inspiration and Ideas for Ecological Design



## WHY DO WE LIKE LAWNS?

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

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH LAWNS?

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

## STYLES & INTERPRETATIONS

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

## IDEAS

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

## RESOURCES

Going Native Garden Tour - April [goingnativegardentour.org](http://goingnativegardentour.org)

California Native Plant Society [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org)

Yerba Buena Demonstration Garden [www.yerbabuenanursery.com](http://www.yerbabuenanursery.com)

Professional Lawn Replacement [www.naturalfrontyards.com](http://www.naturalfrontyards.com)

California Native Garden Foundation [www.cngf.org](http://www.cngf.org)

Sustainable Landscaping Site with lists of professionals and pictures  
[www.landscapistandards.com](http://www.landscapistandards.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](http://www.capitolwholesalenursery.com)  
Native Revival Nursery [www.nativerivival.com](http://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](http://www.santa-monica.org/epd/news/gardengarden.htm)

## **HOW TO REMOVE YOUR LAWN**

**DEVA LUNA  
9/9/2009**

**EarthCare Landscaping**

- 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 sq ft 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 aid you, shade out lawn and let it decompose. Must be persistent 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**

#### **Remove**

- Small areas, use pick & shovel
- Rent a sod-cutter if grade too high, or noxious weeds are present

- 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 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

## **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

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.

REBATES: [www.valleywater.org](http://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 \$2,000, material costs reimbursed
- Commercial properties up to \$20,000
- Palo Alto, Morgan Hill and Milpitas will match

## RESOURCES

**Comparative example:** [www.santa-monica.org/epd/news/gardengarden.htm](http://www.santa-monica.org/epd/news/gardengarden.htm)

**Going Native Garden Tour - April 20, 2008** [www.goingnativegardentour.org](http://www.goingnativegardentour.org)

**California Native Plant Society** [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org)

**Yerba Buena Demonstration Garden** [www.yerbabuenanursery.com](http://www.yerbabuenanursery.com)

**EarthCare's affordable lawn replacement program** [www.naturalfrontyards.com](http://www.naturalfrontyards.com)

**Alrie Middlebrook's "Lose the Lawn"** [www.losethelawn.com](http://www.losethelawn.com)

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

[www.landscapistandards.com](http://www.landscapistandards.com)