

Lawn Alternatives
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There is much discussion these days on eliminating grass lawns, and unless your lawn gets a lot of use for play by kids and pets, it's definitely something to consider.

Grass lawns are heavy consumers of water and fertilizer and often require pesticides and fungicides to keep them looking their best. They are also maintenance intensive, requiring mowing and edging a good part of the year. For a different look in your garden and to cut down on watering, fertilizer use and maintenance, consider converting to a no-lawn garden.

Mixed annual and perennial flowers with native grasses are a beautiful substitute for a lawn. Imagine a meadow outside your home inviting birds and butterflies. Choose plants according to your exposure, soil and climate. If the area gets less than six hours sun, select plants labeled for part sun or shade. Annual wildflowers usually need to be reseeded the first few years, but some like bachelor's buttons and cosmos self-sow, returning to bloom each year.

Break up an expanse of lawn with planting beds and small patio areas joined by paths. Fill the beds with layers of plants, keeping low growing ones along the border and graduating to taller plants in the center. Consider adding a water feature like small pond, bird bath or fountain. Make your area a retreat by adding a bench for seating.

Want that low to the ground look? Use sedum, dead nettle and creeping thyme. Think about using groundcovers for places where foot traffic is limited or discouraged. The variations in textures, colors and heights give you a lot to work with. Armeria, artemisia and cotoneaster are groundcovers that are drought tolerant and fire resistant. Also consider yarrow, coyote bush (*baccharis pilularis*) and lamb's ears.

Add trees and shrubs that do not need a lot of water once established. Established woody plants need be irrigated only once or twice during the growing season. However, all plants will need more water if they are exposed to extreme heat and wind. As another alternative to lawn, look at shrubs like acacia, ceanothus, and rockrose. Plumbago, rosemary, and spirea are other options. Also consider red barberry, western redbud, California flannel bush and lavender.

When considering alternatives to a grass lawn, think about using natives also. Natives are ideally suited to our climate, likely to thrive with only seasonal rainfall and need little care. Once established their deep root systems help them survive.

Keep your no-lawn landscape well mulched to preserve moisture in the soil. This approach promotes sustainable gardening practices that reduce the use of water, fertilizer and pesticides.

The next Saturday class will be held on December 1st. Master Gardeners present “Selecting and Planting Fruit Trees.” The class starts at 9 a.m. and is held in the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court, Placerville. There is no charge for the class.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:(530)621-5512). Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.

Do you have plant containers to recycle? Master Gardeners will gladly take them at the Master Gardener Office. Call before dropping them off and thank you for the donation.