

June 24, 2015



Lawn Gone

By Paula Bertram

UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

As my loyal readership (Hi, Mom!) may recall, your humble author previously submitted an article about caring for a lawn in a low water year. But, with the fourth year of drought upon us, some friends are muttering imprecations about my “so-called advice,” and plan to remove their lawn entirely. Their points are well taken: Reduce water usage and eliminate the care, feeding, weeding and mowing that lawn entails.

Some folks want to substitute edibles for all or part of a lawn. Others plan to install native plants and/or grasses to replace their turf. Covering up the previous lawn site with bark or wood chips is an option. Patios and other hardscape enhancements could be entertained. Considering the pros and cons of lawn and pre-planning the replacement are excellent pastimes, best entertained with a cool beverage in hand. But, how the heck does one actually get rid of the stuff?

Spoiler alert! Beneath that tender grassy surface lurks a tenacious thick deep mat of root system that must be dealt with severely. If the roots are not removed or killed, the lawn may regenerate into your new vegetable garden, native plant landscape or garden path. We call this the Vampire Lawn Scenario.

Here are your choices:

1. Manual removal of the turf. This involves digging deep, really deep, and prying up the sod. It's best to use a specially rented machine called a sod cutter (sounds like something you might imbibe in an Irish pub). Entice your least favorite brother-in-law to assist. He works out, right?

June 24, 2015

This process is not for sissies. Just try to jab a shovel into that mat -- you'll see what you're up against. Once the entire mess is dug up, then you will have to dispose of the whole shebang. Or, you can flip the strips of sod upside down and let them die in place. Slowly.

2. Chemicals. Glyphosate (Roundup) will do the job, but it may take several applications. This will not work well on a half-dead-from-dehydration lawn. Plants should be in an active state of growth. You must use proper application equipment: protective clothing, eyewear, gloves, etc. Make sure you do this on a still day to avoid drift onto the neighbor's prize roses. Then: patience, my friend. It will take days to weeks for the grass to succumb. The area can then be turned over by hand or rototiller and amended for future plantings.

3. Solarizing. This method also works best when the plants to be solarized are actively growing and the weather is going to be hot for a few months. Keep watering until D-Day. Then spread strong clear or black plastic over the entire area, weight down the edges with sand or soil or landscape pins and let 'er cook. This can take a couple of months to do the deed. Make sure no small pets are trapped under the plastic -- they will not thrive.

4. Big Mound of Stuff method. This involves layering newspaper or cardboard, mulch, leaves, garden waste, sprinklings of soil, and compost right over the top of the lawn. Sorry, no old tires or rusty appliances. Build up these layers eight to twelve inches high. The lack of light and oxygen will kill the turf eventually. And you will have a fertile paradise for your new plantings. You could combine method 1: "Manual removal of the turf" with method 4: "Big Mound of Stuff" method.

You may have guessed that all of these methods will produce a rather less than attractive landscape for a period of days to months. This will be especially irksome if lawn deconstruction involves a front yard. People will talk. There may be admonishments from the neighborhood association (check your CC&Rs as needed). Old friends may cross to the other side of the street, averting their eyes.

But you can hold your head high knowing that You Are Doing This For The Greater Good. Plus, you can brag about your lower water bill, your new care free patio with native grass accents, and your letter of commendation from the Governor. Ha, ha!

For more info: there is a great article including much more detail and a discussion of lawn alternatives at http://ucanr.edu/sites/scmg/Lawn_Replacement/Grass_Removal_Methods/.

Join UCCE Master Gardener Heidi Napier for this Saturday's free class on Living with Oaks. El Dorado County is graced with handsome and enduring oak trees; however new construction, irrigated lawns and cultivated land can endanger them. Learn about the proper care to maintain and protect these wonderful trees. Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville.

June 24, 2015

On July 8th there will be a special class on Gardening With Kids: Raising Worms! Kids will learn how worms turn kitchen scraps into valuable nutrients for your plants, and they'll make their own worm bin to take some worms home. Ages 5-7 accompanied by an adult, age 8 and up on their own. Pre-register at <http://ucanr.edu/edc-raisingworms>, and pay a \$5.00 fee. Three classes will be held between 9:00 a.m. and noon at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive in Cameron Park.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer your questions at local farmers markets and in their office every Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, 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/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook.