

Lawn Alternatives

Should the Landscape Assessment Tool results indicate you do not really have any practical reason for a grassy area, consider removing the lawn entirely and replacing it with a lawn alternative.

Lawn alternatives are simply low growing plants (groundcovers) that spread to form a mat of 'green' space. Some tolerate traffic, many are evergreen, many bear flowers, some produce berries.

Most importantly, this Fact Sheet offers some ideas for lawn alternatives that are low-water and low-maintenance.

Consider removing your lawn using the 'lasagna gardening' method, as it is the most environment-friendly way of accomplishing the task.* Then, plant your selected lawn alternative into the mulch. Click [here](#) for more on 'lasagna gardening'.

* Lasagna gardening and sheet mulching are not effective on sandy soils.

Here are a few of the many options for lawn alternatives, including suitability, cultural requirements, comments, etc. Click [here](#) for information about low-water turf seed blends.

DUTCH WHITE CLOVER

- tolerates low to moderate traffic; when mixed with a drought-tolerant lawn seed blend, it withstands moderate to heavy traffic
- drought resistant
- greens early in the spring
- mow in mid-summer to maintain orderly appearance
- flowers attract bees
- inexpensive
- grows in poor soil
- improves soil through nitrogen fixing
- use a mix of clover and grass in areas where erosion is an issue

CREeping STONECROP (SEDUM)

- does not tolerate foot traffic
- drought resistant once established
- 'semi-evergreen' – may retain some leaf colour through winter
- variety of flower colours and foliage colours and shapes
- thrives in nutrient-poor, well-drained soil
- full sun to part shade

TURKISH SPEEDWELL (VERONICA LIWANENSIS)

- tolerates light traffic
- drought resistant in part shade
- evergreen – leaves turn a bronzy colour in extreme heat and sun
- flowers mid spring to early summer
- full sun to part shade

BLUE RUG JUNIPER

- occasional light traffic
- especially good on slopes
- tolerates some shade
- very little water requirement once established
- tolerates many soil conditions, provided it is well-drained
- evergreen

WOOLLY OR CREEPING THYME

- light traffic; woolly thyme foliage emits a pleasant fragrance
- full sun
- mother-of-thyme is another groundcover thyme that spreads relatively quickly
- all have pink to light purple flowers
- low water requirement once established
- shear with a mower after bloom to encourage robust growth
- all are evergreen but may need some clean-up in spring

KINNIKINNICK (BEARBERRY)

- no traffic
- slow to establish, then grows at a moderate to fast rate
- full sun to partial shade
- low water requirement in part shade once established
- light pink flowers in mid spring
- colourful berries in fall
- evergreen
- prune winter dieback in spring, if necessary
- try to plant native kinnikinnick, not a cultivar
- best in poor soils

COMMON YARROW

- tolerates heavy traffic
- spreads by rhizomes – keep it in control
- full sun
- water every 2-3 weeks until established, then no supplemental water required
- plant the native common yarrow
- tolerant of poor soil
- mow every 6 weeks during growing season: flower stems are not ‘nice’ on bare feet!
- semi-evergreen

NOTE

For areas of dry shade consider Japanese spurge, periwinkle, sweet woodruff, lamium or English ivy. Be sure to contain these spreaders.

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