

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 is 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 of sun per day, 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 (*Centaurea cyanus*) and cosmos (*Cosmos* species), self-sow and rebloom 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 plants 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 (*Sedum* species), dead-nettle (*Lamium* species) and creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*). 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. Sea thrift (*Armeria maritima*), mugwort (*Artemisia* species), and cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster* species) are groundcovers that are drought tolerant and fire resistant. Also consider yarrow (*Achillea* species), coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis*), and Lamb's-ears (*Stachys byzantine*).

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 ceanothus (*Ceanothus* species) and rockrose (*Cistus* species). Plumbago (*Plumbago* species), rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*), and spirea (*Spiraea* species) are other options. Also consider western redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*), California flannel bush (*Fremontodendron californicum*), and lavender (*Lavendula* species).

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 environmental adaptations 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.

Master Gardener classes are offered monthly throughout the county. You can find our class schedule at: http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education_Classes/?calendar=yes&g=56698, and recorded classes on many gardening topics here: http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education/Classes/.

The Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open weekly on Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m. -noon March through October. We do close in case of rain, please check our website for details https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/Demonstration_Garden/

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard to answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the “Ask a Master Gardener” option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We’ll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news.